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THE LONG SHADOW OF THE WITCH TRIALS

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From
Frankenstein
to Terminator
The deep roots
of AI

ROME'S BRUTAL PEACE

How the Romans used the
threat of violence to
control their vast empire

Medieval escape artist

The rebel who fled
the Tower of London
and overthrew a king

The battle for the NHS

How the health service survived
its troubled early years

Fighting for freedom

How the civil rights movement revolutionised America



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Stroke
Association

“At its peak, the Roman empire “stretched from the Atlantic to Arabia, and from the icy northern seas to the Sahara”. How could Rome keep control of such a vast realm? In our cover feature this month, Tom Holland seeks to answer that question, focusing on **the golden age of Pax Romana** – two centuries of relative peace and prosperity across the Roman domain. As Tom explains, even in an age of limited warfare, the threat of violence was always lurking below the surface. You can read his evocative piece on page 22.

The traditional starting point of Pax Romana is the beginning of the reign of Augustus, Rome’s first emperor, who emerged triumphant from the decades of civil wars surrounding the rise and fall of Julius Caesar. Those tumultuous years are the subject of our new podcast series, where I’ve been joined by several historians to tell the story of the most famous assassination in history. All six episodes of **Caesar: Death of a Dictator** are available to listen to now, free for magazine subscribers, at historyextra.com/caesarpodcast.

Also this month, we’re marking the 75th anniversary of the **formation of the NHS**. Despite its critics, many would argue that the health service is one of Britain’s best-loved institutions, but it hasn’t always been that way. In his fascinating article, on page 30, Andrew Seaton revisits the highs and lows of the NHS’s history to reveal how it became so cherished.

I hope you enjoy the issue.

Rob Attar
Editor



THREE THINGS I’VE LEARNED THIS MONTH

1. Take me to your leader

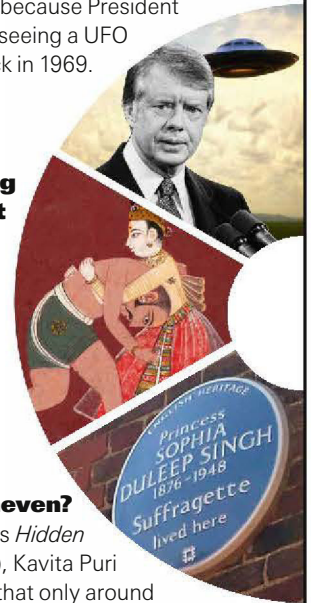
One curious detail in our piece about the history of UFO sightings (page 14) is that Nasa was asked to open an investigation in the 1970s because President Jimmy Carter had reported seeing a UFO in Georgia back in 1969.

2. Wrestling with the past

I was surprised to learn from our interview with Joya Chatterji (page 66) that the sport of wrestling has historically been an “obsession” in south Asia.

3. Honours uneven?

In this month’s *Hidden Histories* (page 18), Kavita Puri highlights the fact that only around 15 per cent of blue plaques situated across London commemorate women.



THIS ISSUE’S CONTRIBUTORS



Joya Chatterji

“In my new history of south Asia, I’m trying to show the extent to which things remain connected, despite the formation of the nations of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. You can’t easily rip such societies apart.”

Joya untangles the complex history of south Asia in the 20th century on page 66



Paul Dryburgh

“Roger Mortimer engineered the unprecedented deposition of an English king and possibly embarked on an infamous romance with the queen. But he overreached himself, and paid the ultimate penalty.”

Paul introduces the political schemer who helped depose Edward II on page 40



Marion Gibson

“My new book chronicles the history of witch trials over seven centuries. Through it I’ve explored how we’ve come a long way, but have also gotten nowhere in our attempts to end persecution.”

Marion considers how witch hunts still afflict society today on page 59



Adriane Lentz-Smith

“I think of the civil rights movement as the sequel to the grand democratic experiment that was Reconstruction in the 19th century. As with any sequel, there’s still room in the narrative – there’s work yet undone.”

Adriane is one of the contributors to our feature chronicling five moments from the US civil rights campaign on page 46

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PHONE

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Editorial 0117 300 8699

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Editorial historymagazine@historyextra.com

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BBC History Magazine,
PO Box 3320, 3 Queensbridge,
Northampton, NN4 7BF. Basic
annual subscription rates:
UK: £84.50, Eire/Europe: € 120,
USA: \$168.87, AUS/NZ: AU\$180
ROW: \$136

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you can contact us at:
 PO Box 37495, Boone,
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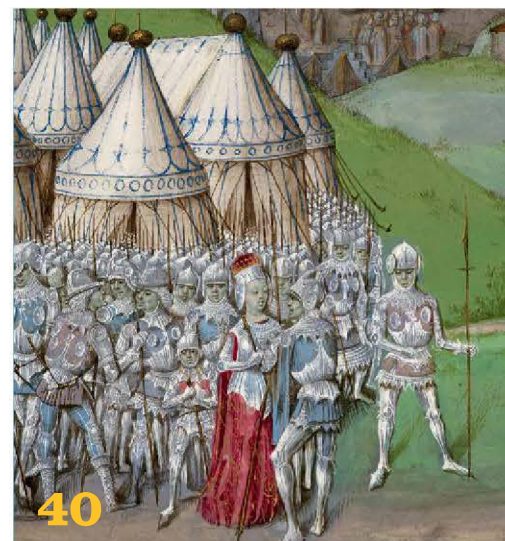
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USPS Identification Statement BBC HISTORY (ISSN 1469-8552) (USPS 024-177) August 2023 is published 13 times a year under licence from BBC Studios by Immediate Media Company London Limited, Vineyard House, 44 Brook Green, Hammersmith, London W6 7BT, UK. Distributed in the US by NPS Media Group, 2 Enterprise Drive, Suite 420, Shelton, CT 06484. Periodicals postage paid at Shelton, CT and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to BBC HISTORY MAGAZINE, PO Box 37495, Boone, IA 50037-0495.

ANNIVERSARIES

HELEN CARR highlights events that took place in August in history

5 AUGUST 1962

The body of Marilyn Monroe is discovered

The 36-year-old actor dies after overdosing on sleeping pills

“Marilyn Monroe Dead, Pills Near.” So read a *New York Times* headline on 6 August 1962, reporting the demise of the era’s most famous ‘blonde bombshell’. The actor born Norma Jeane Mortenson had been found dead in her home in Brentwood, Los Angeles the previous morning. Posthumously described in the same *Times* article as “a contemporary Venus”, the star of films including *Some Like it Hot* had fatally overdosed on barbiturates.

Monroe had spent the day before her death at home, seeing only her psychiatrist, her publicist, her photographer and her housekeeper, Eunice Murray – perhaps the people she trusted most deeply. Having long experienced depression, crippling endometriosis and insomnia, over recent years her dependency on alcohol and prescription drugs had spiralled into addiction.

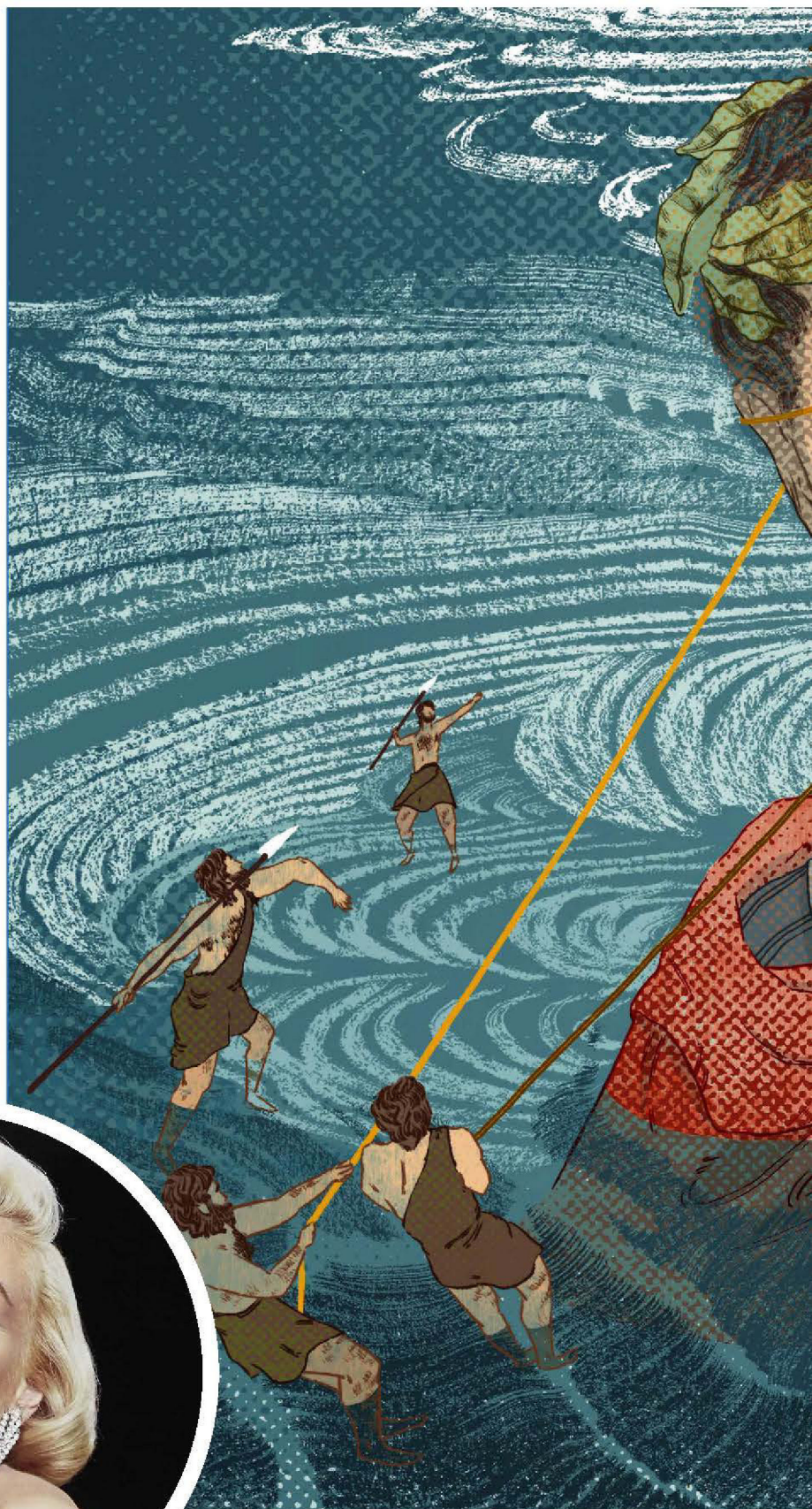
At around 3.30am on 5 August, Murray woke to see a light shining from under Monroe’s locked bedroom door. Receiving no response to her knocks, Murray phoned Ralph Greenson, Monroe’s psychiatrist; on his advice, she peered in through a window, and saw the actor lying face-down on her bed. When he arrived, Greenson broke in and discovered that Monroe was dead.

Despite numerous conspiracy theories, it is most likely that her death at the age of 36 was suicide – the culmination of a tragic life in the spotlight and the immense pressure that accompanied it.

Marilyn Monroe enjoyed huge success, but also suffered from depression



CAT O’NEIL/BRIDGEMAN/GETTY IMAGES



King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra, pictured on the day of their coronation at Westminster Abbey



9 AUGUST 1902

Edward VII and his wife, Alexandra, are crowned king and queen of the United Kingdom and the British Dominions, and emperor and empress of India.

26 AUGUST 55 BC

Julius Caesar's Roman legions invade Britain

Troops land on the Kent coast but face massed British resistance

The white cliffs of Dover gleamed like a beacon as 80 ships approached the coast of Kent. Having crossed the Channel overnight, by mid-morning on 26 August 55 BC, the vessels were preparing to land. On board were some 12,000 Roman troops of the VII and famous X legions commanded by Julius Caesar. Having subdued the tribes of Gaul – roughly encompassing what's now France – after three hard years of fighting, the great general turned his gaze to the island across the Channel.

Though by now late in the campaigning season, Caesar sensed there was something to be taken in Britain – perhaps land, perhaps glory. Naturally, as a seasoned warrior and commander, he did not set out unprepared. A scout was dispatched to assess the coastline, and a Gaulish chieftain, Commius, undertook a diplomatic mission to contact the British tribes and muster support for the advancing Roman army.

Unsurprisingly, despite those efforts, the sight that greeted Caesar's troops that August morning was an intimidating one: the clifftops were lined with weapon-wielding warriors, and horsemen and chariots prepared to repel any Roman attempt to land.

At length, the invading army managed to anchor offshore, probably near the location of modern Deal. They were met by a barrage of spears but, finally, the eagle-bearer of the X legion leapt into the waves, spurring his comrades to attack. Waterlogged Roman troops surged onto the shore, forcing back the Britons, who fled inland. With no cavalry – which was on other ships still at sea – the legions could not launch a pursuit. Then the wind turned again, and a storm thrashed both soldiers scouting the countryside and supply ships at sea. After one attempt at pitched battle, the Roman legions retreated to their ships and returned to Gaul.

Caesar tried again the following year, gaining hostages and an annual tribute. But it wasn't until AD 43 that the Romans launched the invasion that would see them conquer most of Britain.



Indonesian nationalist
Mohammad Hatta, who
campaigns for independence
from Dutch rule



17 AUGUST 1945

Indonesian nationalist leaders **declare independence from the Dutch empire**, launching a revolution that will last over four years and end with the creation of the new Republic of Indonesia in December 1949.



19 AUGUST 1839

The daguerreotype system is revealed in Paris

The first publicly available photographic process revolutionises image creation

Excitement swept through the halls of the Institut de France in Paris. Word spread that a device had been created to capture a “truthful likeness” – not using paint or pencil, but imprinting an image on a metal sheet. It was to be explained at a joint session of the Académie des Sciences and the Académie des Beaux-Arts. Unlike other gatherings of this nature, this one was packed with eager spectators and journalists thronging the courtyard, all waiting for artist and chemist Louis Daguerre to explain his magic. And on Monday 19 August 1839, he revealed his revolutionary process.

His ‘daguerreotype’ system involved capturing each detailed image on a silver-

plated copper sheet polished to a mirror sheen. Exposed to iodine fumes, the plate would become sensitive to light, and was placed inside a large box camera to capture the image. The plate was developed in mercury fumes, then fixed with salt water.

This was not the first photographic process – heliographs had been captured more than a decade earlier by Nicéphore Niépce, with whom Daguerre later collaborated. But the announcement propelled Daguerre to international fame. The following year, English polymath William Henry Fox Talbot, who had been working on related processes for several years, developed the first calotypes – paper photographs produced from negative images.

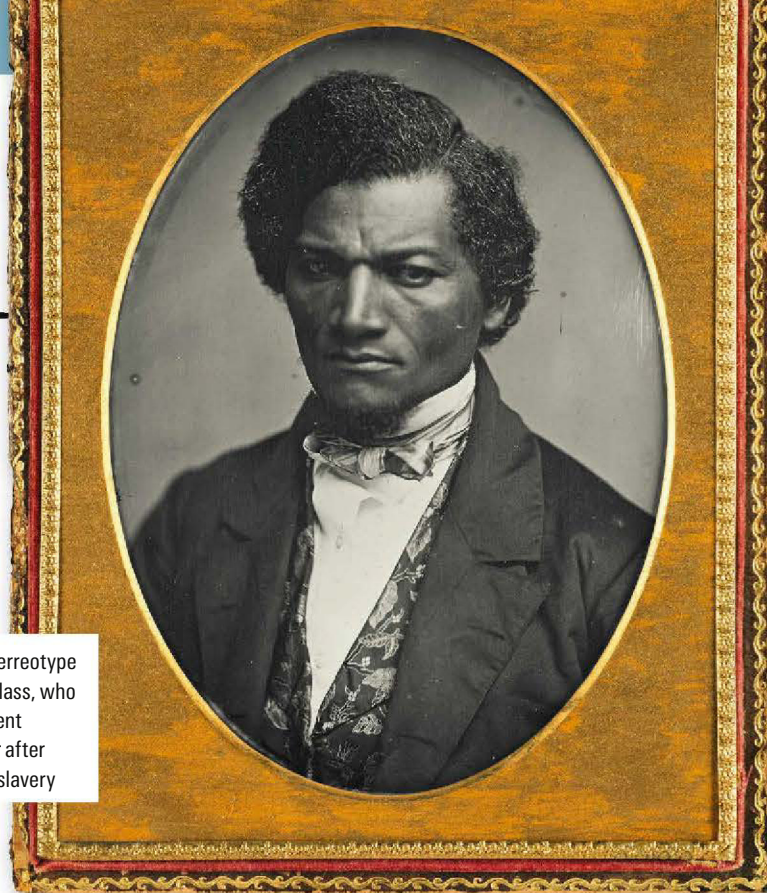
22 AUGUST 1485

Lancastrian forces led by Henry Tudor defeat the Yorkist army of Richard III at Bosworth Field in the pivotal battle of the Wars of the Roses, marking the start of the royal Tudor dynasty.



A c1838 daguerreotype of the Boulevard du Temple, Paris – believed to be the first photograph featuring a human figure, and among the earliest surviving photographic plates

GETTY IMAGES/TOPFOTO



A c1847–52 daguerreotype of Frederick Douglass, who became a prominent abolitionist leader after himself escaping slavery

11 AUGUST 1841

Frederick Douglass gives his first public speech to a white audience

The formerly enslaved black man shares experiences of bondage

Frederick Douglass had led a remarkable life. The son of an enslaved black woman and an unknown white man, he was born into slavery in Maryland. He was taught the alphabet by the wife of the man for whom he was forced to work; having also taught himself to read, he shared Bible stories with other enslaved people. Then, in September 1838, Douglass escaped. Disguised as a sailor, he caught a train from Baltimore to Philadelphia, continuing then to New York City, a free man. Intent on securing liberty for others, he soon joined the burgeoning abolitionist movement.

A natural speaker, fired by the devastation and rage of his own experiences, on 11 August 1841 – just three years after his own escape from slavery – Douglass delivered a speech to an audience of more than 1,000 people in Nantucket, Massachusetts. From the lectern, he gazed out over a sea of white faces broken only occasionally by the face of another black person, leaving him intimidated and shaking. The Quaker abolitionist William Coffin invited Douglass to speak that evening – and Douglass was urged to simply “Tell your story”.

There is no record of Douglass’s exact words that evening, but journalists who had gathered to hear him were clearly moved by what he had to say. Writing for the weekly *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, Lydia Maria Child recounted that “flinty hearts were pierced... and cold ones melted by his eloquence. Our best pleaders for the slave held their breath for fear of interrupting him.”

The meeting closed, attendees left, aghast and sorrowful for the state of the enslaved. But one man lingered behind to speak to Douglass: John A Collins, vice-president of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society. He offered Douglass the role of anti-slavery agent, encouraging him to travel widely and tell his story. He did just that, writing three autobiographies and spreading the word about slavery and the lives of enslaved people in the American south. Douglass met Abraham Lincoln three times and, on their final encounter, in March 1865, the president told him: “There is no man in the country whose opinion I value more than yours.” **E**

Helen Carr is a historian and writer. Her latest book is *The Red Prince* (Oneworld, 2021)

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BEHIND THE NEWS

AI: an ancient nightmare?

Artificial intelligence has been in the headlines in recent months because of the threat it may pose to humanity. Yet, as **MICHAEL WOOLDRIDGE** reveals, the idea of AI, and the fears surrounding it, are centuries old



The human genius behind AI

Michael Woodridge will discuss AI on our podcast soon: historyextra.com/podcast



Over the past decade, artificial intelligence (AI) has become the most hyped technology since the World Wide Web. Its development has been driven by enormous investment from big tech companies desperate to steal a march on their competitors – and the future of trillion-dollar businesses hinges on whether it succeeds or fails. Progress has been so rapid that some informed observers even claim that machines with the full range of human capabilities ('general AI') may soon be here.

Amid all the excitement, it is easy to forget that AI is not a new field. Indeed, the idea of AI is an ancient one: it appears throughout recorded history in one form or another. Ancient Greek legends feature Hephaestus, divine blacksmith to the gods, who created metal automata to serve Olympus. Jewish folklore has the myth of the golem, a creature fashioned from mud

and given life through arcane rituals. Mary Shelley's 1818 novel *Frankenstein* – the urtext for science fiction – is all about creating artificial life. And Fritz Lang's seminal 1927 film *Metropolis* established an astonishing number of fantasy horror tropes with its *Maschinenmensch* – the 'machine-human' robot that wreaks murderous chaos.

Actually creating AI, however, remained firmly in the realm of science fiction until the advent of the first digital computers soon after the end of the Second World War. Central to this story is Alan Turing, the brilliant British mathematician best known for his work cracking Nazi ciphers at Bletchley Park. Though his code-breaking work was vital for the Allied war effort, Turing deserves to be at least as well known for his work on the development of computers and AI. While studying for his PhD in the 1930s, he produced a design for a mathematical device now known as a 'Turing machine',



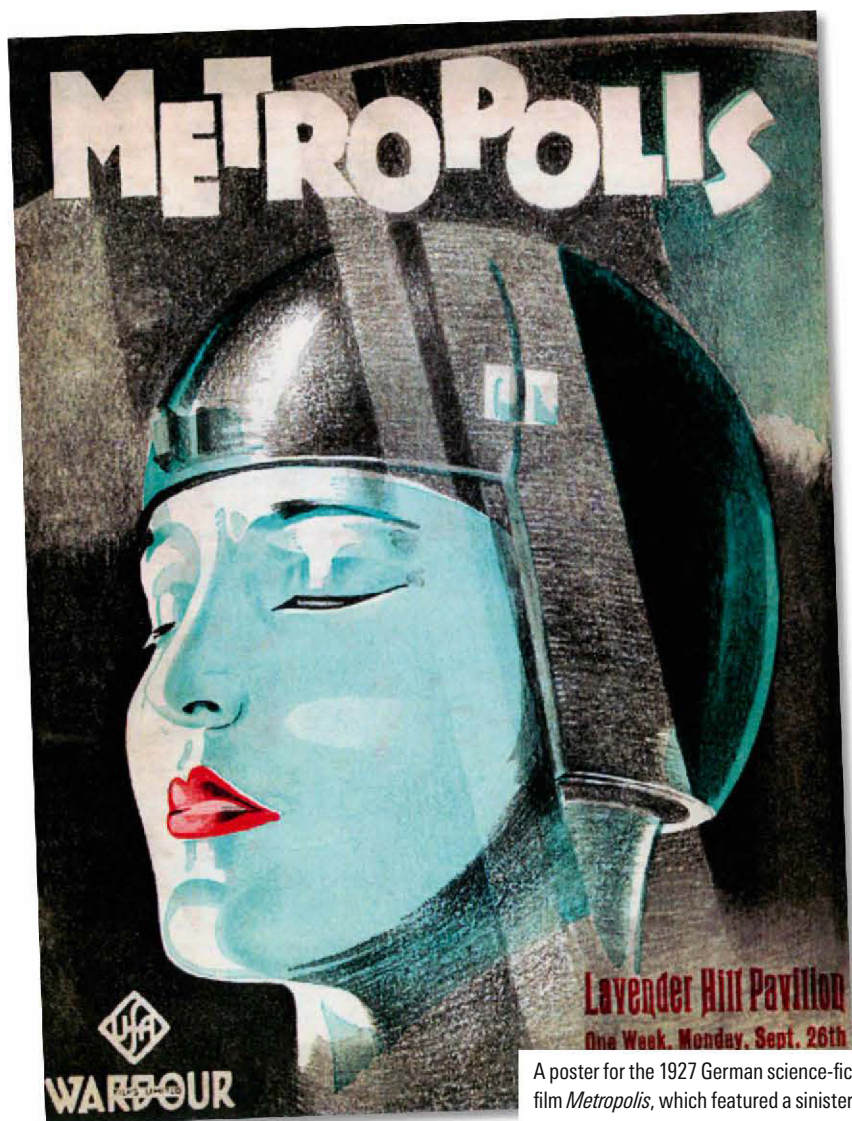
Mathematician and Bletchley Park codebreaker Alan Turing in 1951, the year after he proposed a pioneering test for assessing artificial intelligence

providing a blueprint for computers that is still standard today.

In 1948, Turing took a job at Manchester University to work on Britain's first computer, the so-called 'Manchester baby'. The advent of computers sparked a wave of curiosity about these 'electronic brains', which seemed to be capable of dazzling intellectual feats. Turing apparently became frustrated by dogmatic arguments that intelligent machines were impossible and, in a 1950 article in the journal *MIND*, sought to settle the debate. He proposed a method – which he called the Imitation Game but which is now known as the Turing test – for detecting a machine's ability to display intelligence. A human interrogator engages in conversations with another person and a machine – but the dialogue is conducted via teleprinter, so the interrogator doesn't know which is which. Turing argued that if a machine couldn't be reliably distinguished from a person through such a test, that machine should be considered intelligent.

At the same time, on the other side of the Atlantic, US academic John McCarthy had become interested in the possibility of intelligent machines. In 1955, while applying for funding for a scientific conference the

GETTY IMAGES/TOPFOTO



A poster for the 1927 German science-fiction film *Metropolis*, which featured a sinister *Maschinenmensch* (machine-human, or robot) – fuelling fears of artificial intelligence

// The advent of computers sparked a wave of curiosity about 'electronic brains', which seemed to be capable of dazzling intellectual feats //

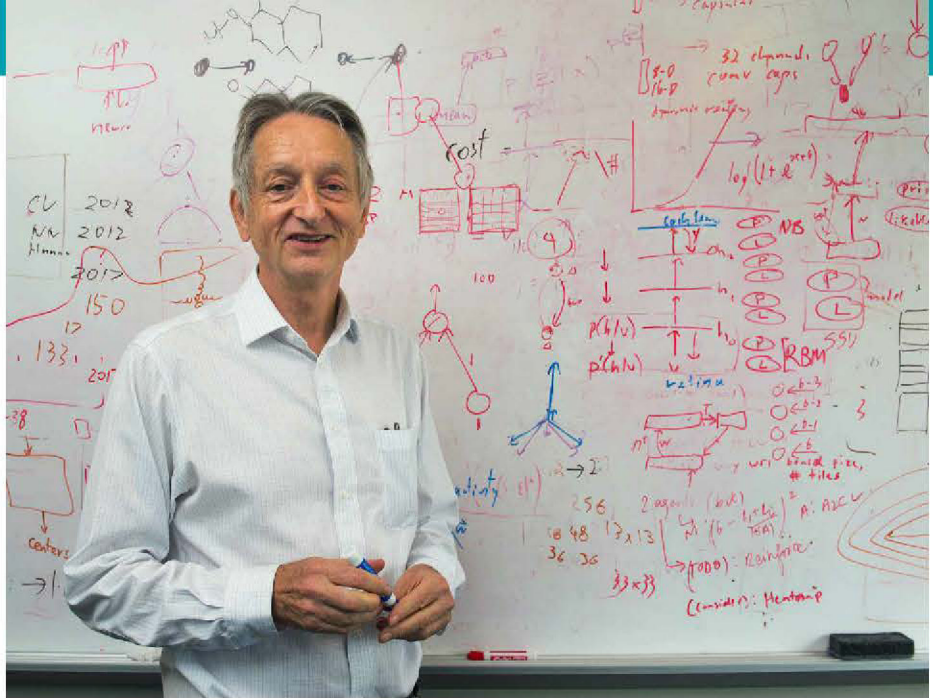
following year, he coined the term ‘artificial intelligence’. McCarthy had grand expectations for his event: he thought that, having brought together researchers with relevant interests, AI would be developed within just a few weeks. In the event, they made little progress at the conference – but McCarthy’s delegates gave birth to a new field, and an unbroken thread connects those scientists through their academic descendants down to today’s AI.

Computer learning

At the end of the 1950s, only a handful of digital computers existed worldwide. Even so, McCarthy and his colleagues had by then constructed computer programs that could learn, solve problems, complete logic puzzles and play games. They assumed that progress would continue to be swift, particularly because computers were rapidly becoming faster and cheaper. But momentum waned and, by the 1970s, research funding agencies had become frustrated by over-optimistic predictions of progress. Cuts followed, and AI acquired a poor reputation. A new wave of ideas prompted a decade of excitement in the 1980s but, once again, progress stalled – and, once again, AI researchers were accused of overinflating expectations of breakthroughs.

Things really began to change this century with the development of a new class of ‘deep learning’ AI systems based on ‘neural network’ technology – itself a very old idea. Animal brains and nervous systems comprise huge numbers of cells called neurons, connected to one another in vast networks: the human brain, for example, contains tens of billions of neurons, each of which has, on average, of the order of 7,000 connections. Each neuron recognises simple patterns in data received by its network connections, prompting it to communicate with its neighbours via electro-chemical signals. Human intelligence somehow arises from these interactions. In the 1940s, US researchers Warren McCulloch and Walter Pitts were struck by the idea that electrical circuits might simulate such systems – and the field of neural networks was born.

Although they’ve been studied continuously since McCulloch and Pitts’ proposal, it took further scientific advances to make neural networks a practical reality. Notably, scientists had to work out how to ‘train’ or configure networks. The required breakthroughs were delivered by British-born researcher Geoffrey Hinton and colleagues in the 1980s. This work prompted a short-lived flurry of interest in the field, but it died down when it became clear that computer technology of the time was not powerful



Professor Geoffrey Hinton in 2017. His groundbreaking work on neural networks supercharged the development of artificial intelligence, but he recently expressed concern that AI might threaten the survival of our species

// The success of ChatGPT has brought to the fore a primal fear: that we might bring something to life – and then lose control //

enough to build useful neural networks. Come the new century, that situation changed: today we live in an age of abundant, cheap computer power and data – both of which are essential for building the deep-learning networks that underpin recent advances in AI.

Neural networks underpinning ChatGPT, the AI program released by OpenAI in November 2022. ChatGPT – the neural networks of which comprise around a trillion components each – immediately went viral, and is now used by hundreds of millions of people every day. Some of its success can be attributed to the fact that it feels exactly like the kind of AI we have seen in the movies.

Using ChatGPT involves simply having a conversation with something that seems both knowledgeable and smart. What its neural networks are doing, however, is quite basic. When you type something, ChatGPT simply tries to predict what text should appear next. To do this, it has been trained using vast amounts of data (including all of the text published on the world wide web). Somehow, those huge neural networks and

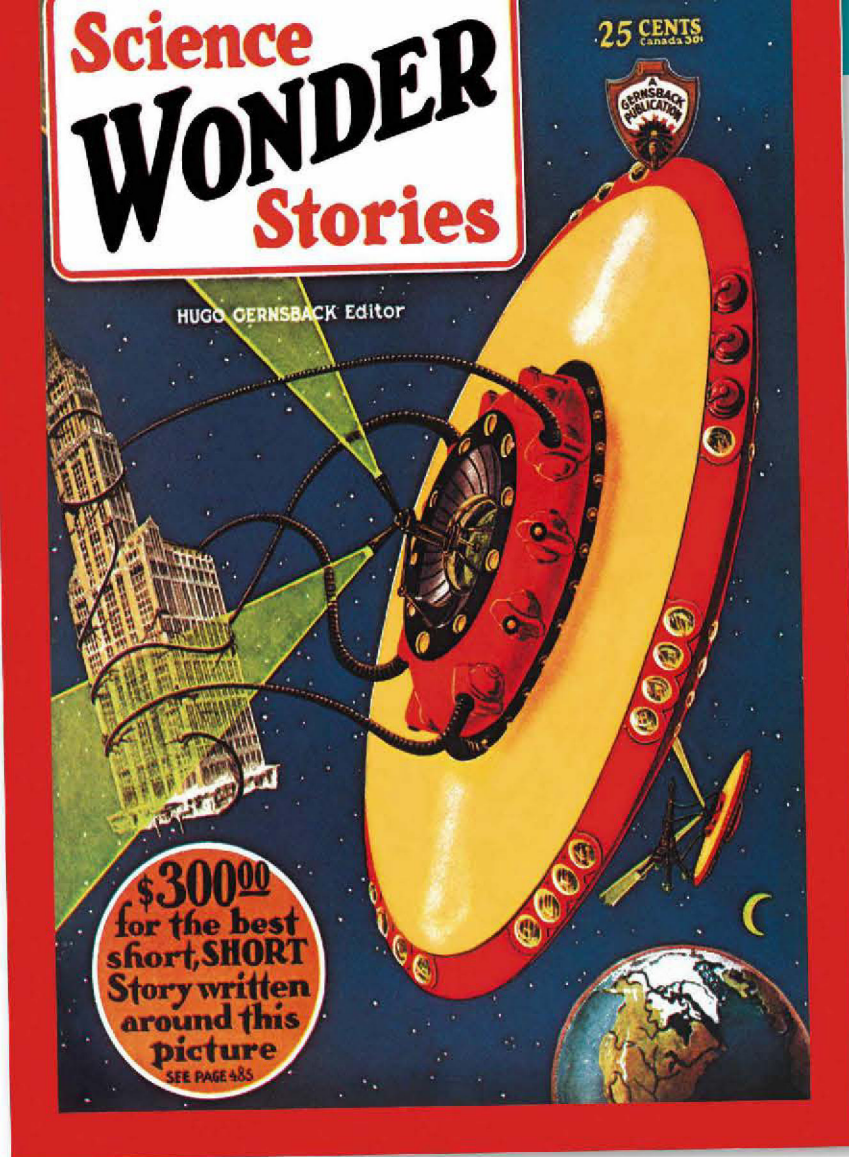
data enable it to provide extraordinarily impressive responses – for all intents and purposes, passing Turing’s test.

The success of ChatGPT has brought to the fore a primal fear: that we might bring something to life – and then lose control. This is the nightmare of *Frankenstein*, *Metropolis* and *The Terminator*. With the unnerving ability of ChatGPT, you might believe that such scenarios could be close at hand. However, though ChatGPT is remarkable, we shouldn’t credit it with too much real intelligence. It is not actually a mind – it only tries to suggest text that might appear next. It isn’t wondering why you are asking it about curry recipes or the performance of Liverpool Football Club – in fact, it isn’t wondering anything. It doesn’t have any beliefs or desires, nor any purpose other than to predict words. ChatGPT is not going to crawl out of the computer and take over.

That doesn’t mean, of course, that there are no potential dangers in AI. One of the most immediate is that ChatGPT or its like may be used to generate disinformation on an industrial scale to influence forthcoming US and UK elections. We also don’t know the extent to which such systems acquire the countless human biases we all display, and which are likely evident in its training data. The program, after all, is doing its best to predict what we would write – so the large-scale adoption of this technology may essentially serve to hold up a mirror to our prejudices. We may not like what we see. **H**



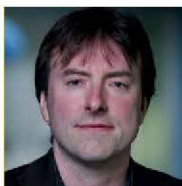
Michael Wooldridge is professor of computer science at the University of Oxford. His book *The Road to Conscious Machines: The Story of AI* is published by Pelican



Space odyssey The cover of a c1930 US sci-fi magazine featuring a stylised depiction of a UFO. Views of what such craft would look like reflect the anxieties of the time, says David Clarke

NEED TO KNOW

“UFO stories come up again and again – and that’s how folklore is created”



A Nasa press conference in May detailing its research into UFO sightings sparked headlines about extraterrestrial visitors – but, as **DAVID CLARKE** explains, these stories are nothing new

Nasa’s recent public comments on UFO sightings reflect a recent resurgence in interest in the topic. The comments revealed that the Pentagon’s UAP [unexplained anomalous phenomenon] Taskforce is currently investigating hundreds of

unexplained sightings reported by military personnel. Back in 2017, a *New York Times* story claimed that a secret Pentagon-funded project had been looking at reports of UFOs by US Navy pilots and military sources since at least 2007. The official US government line

has always been that the Air Force Project Blue Book, which ran from 1947 to 1969, was the last government-funded investigation of odd things in the sky, and that a report from the University of Colorado concluded there was no scientific interest or defence threat. Since then, Nasa’s position has been that it isn’t interested in UFOs, so the 2017 story was a big surprise.

Nasa has always been very reluctant to discuss the subject of UFOs. That was clear even back in the 1970s, when the US secretary of defense asked the space agency to consider reopening an investigation – long after Project Blue Book had closed – because the then president, Jimmy Carter, reported having seen a UFO [in Georgia in 1969]. Now Nasa has finally been dragged back into the UFO debate – and, as was the case in the 70s, it’s because of a groundswell of public and media fascination about the subject.

People seeing odd things in the sky is nothing new. If you look at any British newspaper published just before the outbreak of the First World War, for instance, you will find people claiming that they had seen strange lights in the sky, beams of light coming down to the ground, and elongated objects moving around that they were convinced were German Zeppelins sent to spy on the British Isles. People were anxious: they knew there was a war coming and they’d been told that the Germans would be sending airships to drop bombs on the nation.

Resurgences in UFO sightings tell us something about the period in which they were made. There’s a clear correlation between numbers and types of reports and the release of films and TV shows about UFOs. It’s a crude metric – you can’t say it’s cause and effect – and today there’s a continual drip-drip effect, so it’d now be hard to make any correlation. But it’s definitely the case that around the 1977 release of the Steven Spielberg film *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, the number of annually reported sightings logged by the UK Ministry of Defence soared from a few hundred to a record-breaking 750, the highest total on record at that time. And people react to other prompts, too: whether it’s a story in a local newspaper or a Nasa public statement, those kinds of things cause people to look up at the sky rather than at their feet, and to report memories of things they ‘saw’ years ago.

Our idea of what aliens look like has changed markedly over time. At the end of the 19th century, even before HG Wells



Which royal relative reported a UFO sighting?

Hear more from David about historical stories of visitors from outer space on our podcast: historyextra.com/podcast



HISTORY NEWS IN BRIEF

// There's a clear correlation between numbers of reports and the release of films and TV shows about UFOs //

published *The War of the Worlds*, he wrote a short story called *The Man of the Year Million*, satirising far-future prediction-making and describing what we might look like in the distant future. It claimed we would have tiny bodies, massive heads and huge eyes – and, interestingly, that's how people now often describe aliens. It's also how they are depicted in *Close Encounters* and in Whitley Strieber's hugely influential 1987 alien-abduction autobiography *Communion: A True Story*. It's now burned into our minds and into pop culture.

But between the 1940s and 1960s there were a range of other ideas, too. George Adamski was one of the first of a string of people to become famous in the 1950s for his stories of being contacted by aliens. He described being met in the California desert by tall angelic creatures with long blonde hair and ski suits who came from Venus and Mars. People in South America, meanwhile, claim to have seen creatures coming out of flying saucers who were covered in hair and had bright red eyes.

Our ideas about UFOs have also shifted across the decades. The idea that UFOs were saucer-shaped is partly derived from a

claimed 1947 sighting by US aviator and businessman Kenneth Arnold, which came to define our modern idea of UFOs. But it's not a straightforward story, because what he actually described seeing, while he was out flying over Washington state looking for a crashed aircraft, was a formation of batwing-shaped objects. The media of the time, however, interpreted that as looking like saucers – and, for many decades afterwards, 'flying saucers' were indeed that shape.

Recent headlines may suggest that we are on the cusp of a new discovery – but history shows we've been here many times before. These stories have come up over and over again, and that's precisely how folklore is created – by people's experiences needing to find an outlet, particularly at times when they're feeling stressed or anxious about concerns such as pandemics or nuclear war. It's a reassuring idea that, somewhere out there in the universe, there's a superior civilisation that has survived these problems and has now come to help us.

These stories also suggest that the nasty government knows all about this and is hiding it from us – and if only we put enough pressure on them, they will finally admit that the truth is out there. But history shows us that there has never been a single subject that all the governments of the world agree on – so the idea that all the nations have got together and agreed to conceal this truth from us doesn't make any sense. **H**

.....
David Clarke is associate professor in the Department of Media Arts and Communications at Sheffield Hallam University, and co-founder of the Centre for Contemporary Legend

Carved wood shown to pre-date Stonehenge

A piece of oak bearing decorative markings, preserved in peat and discovered four years ago in Berkshire, is the oldest-known carved wood in Britain. Radiocarbon-dating has now established that the metre-long chunk is over 6,600 years old – two millennia older than the monoliths at Stonehenge. "Amazing discoveries like these remind us of the power of archaeology to uncover the hidden narratives," said Duncan Wilson of Historic England. The piece will be displayed at West Berkshire Museum in Newbury.

Red herrings and partying pigs in rare minstrel script

Newly discovered texts in a medieval document at the National Library of Scotland have been identified as a minstrel's routines – and feature the first-known use of the term 'red herring'. Studying the Heege Manuscript of c1480, Dr James Wade of the University of Cambridge found sketches "full of jokes and absurd hijinks", performed by "a minstrel telling his audience, perhaps people of very different social standing, to get drunk and be merry".



This finial is among the colonial-era objects whose future is currently being assessed by the National Trust

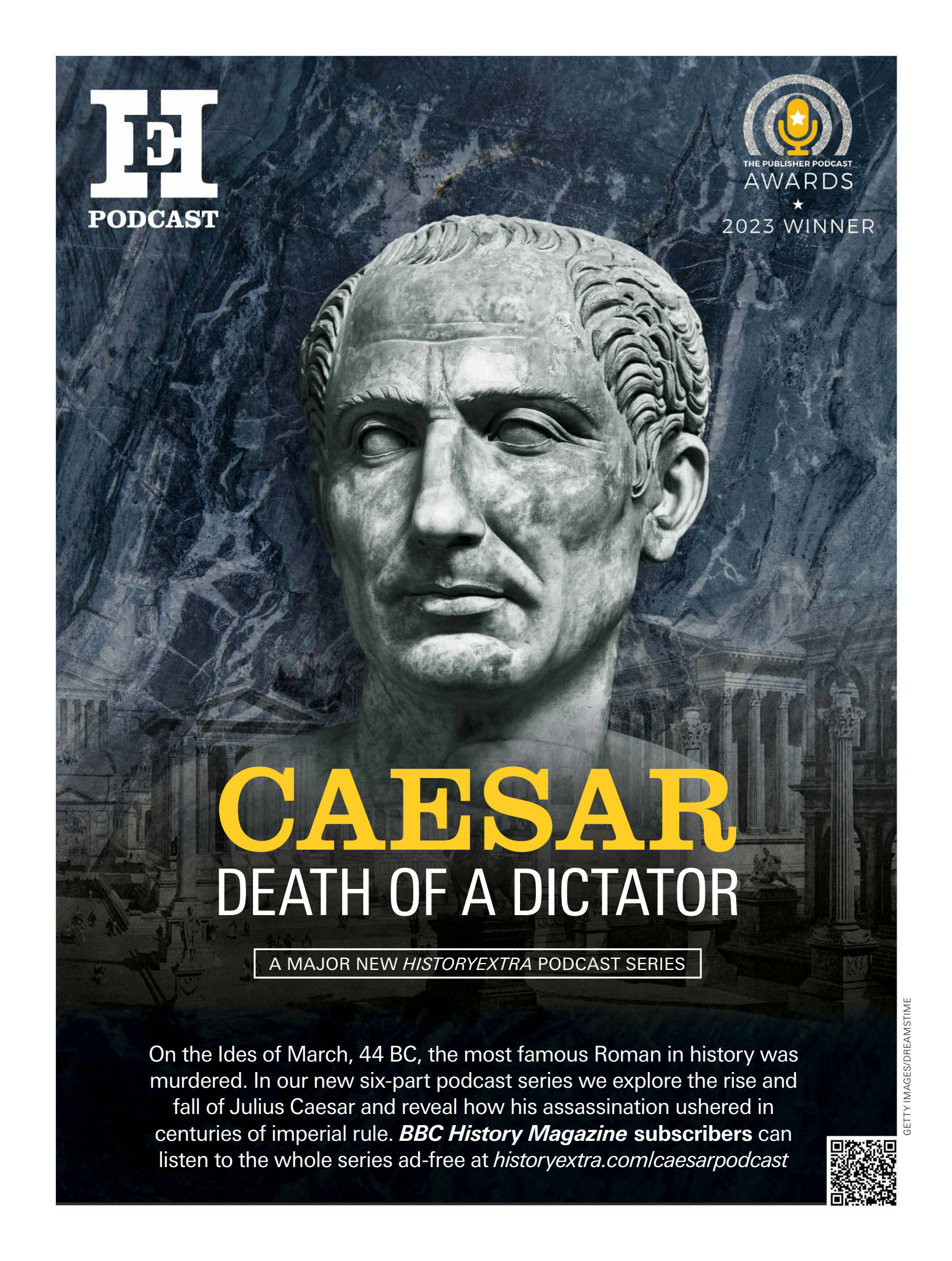
National Trust looking at policy on colonial objects

The National Trust is "in the process of creating our own policy" on the return of items acquired in overseas lands during periods of British colonial rule. Many NT properties contain such objects – including Powis Castle, which houses hundreds of artefacts brought from India by Robert Clive. Speaking at the Hay Festival in May, René Olivieri, the charity's chair, said that the new policy would follow advice given by the Museums Association and the Arts Council England, adding that: "Provenance needs to come into public access [and] public benefit." **H**

ALAMY



Staff of the US Air Force Project Blue Book, pictured in c1955. A university report on its findings concluded that it had produced no evidence of scientific interest, or to indicate a threat to national defence



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MICHAEL WOOD ON... THE ORIGINS OF THE WEST

// The roots of western culture do not lie in Greco-Roman antiquity //

Michael Wood is professor of public history at the University of Manchester. He has presented numerous BBC series, and is the author of several books including *The Story of China* (Simon & Schuster, 2021). His Twitter handle is @mayavision

B B C

THE SUPERVISOR OF MY POSTGRADUATE WORK years ago was Michael Wallace-Hadrill, a pioneering scholar of early western Europe, of the Merovingians and the Carolingian Renaissance, as it became known in the 1960s. His best-known book was *The Barbarian West*, in which he emphasised that the real roots of the west are to be found in the barbarian tribes and their elites in the post-Roman period: Franks, Visigoths, Angles, Saxons and Ostrogoths. His story told how western Europeans adopted Latin Christian civilisation and, in the ninth century, created the first European renaissance – a turning point in the history of Europe. Aided by revived Latin learning, Greek knowledge and science, Hebrew religion and, as the eighth-century English scholar Alcuin put it, “the light that came from Africa”, theirs were violent but rich and diverse cultures, always willing to learn from the ‘Other’.

When I made a series of films in 1991 about the history of civilisation – visiting Iraq, India, Egypt, China – I titled the last episode after Michael’s book. I was inviting the audience to see western culture in a fresh light: as a latecomer, its values shaped in the so-called ‘Dark Ages’ through Germanic kingship, assembly politics (the roots of western democracy), Latin Christianity and possessive individualism. Needless to say, some – especially in the US – saw the title as anti-western. But the key was the idea that the roots of western culture did not lie in Greco-Roman antiquity but in the marriage of Germanic institutions and Latin civilisation in the post-Roman centuries that gave

birth to the kingdoms of medieval and modern Europe.

I thought of Michael the other day as I listened to Book of the Week on Radio 4 – Naoise Mac Sweeney’s *The West: A New History of an Old Idea*. Its theme is the grand narrative of the Greco-Roman origins of the west, an idea invented in the 19th century that is now threadbare and, in Mac Sweeney’s words, “morally bankrupt”. To be fair, that narrative has not been current among most historians for a long time, but the book is a bracing addition to the ongoing deconstruction of the historiographical pillars of western cultural supremacy. But it is about a myth – because the real roots of western culture lie elsewhere.

Europe, of course, is not like China, which united early; savage wars of nationalism are still being fought here. But in western Europe there was an acknowledged commonality – a shared Latin Christian culture. Men and women of the ninth and tenth centuries assumed that they belonged to a western world. Not just Franks and Anglo-Saxons: Muslim writers, too, recognised this distinction, using words like *Rum* and *Firanj* as not only geographical but cultural indicators of western Christendom.

Westerners’ understanding of their roots is evident in a late 10th-century scholar’s summary of the previous 300 years of western cultural history. He starts with Theodore of Tarsus and Hadrian the African – refugees from Syria and Libya, respectively – bringing the learning of the eastern Mediterranean, north Africa and southern Italy to England in the seventh century. Here, through the powerhouses of Canterbury, Wearmouth and Jarrow, it was copied and disseminated across Europe. The scholars who shaped western culture are listed, master to student, one generation to the next, to the late 10th century: “All who study today still drink from their fountains.”

That writer is saying something real. People in the 10th century understood their allegiance to Latin Christendom as shaped by western European kings and their elites. The three European renaissances all drew on these traditions. The brilliant achievements of the west were grounded in what happened in western Europe between the sixth century and the year 1000.

As is told by Professor Mac Sweeney, in the 18th and 19th centuries – the age of colonialism – new narratives were created to corroborate earthly rule. ‘The west’ as a cultural (and racial) construct, first clearly articulated in the 1840s, was one fathered by a culturally pure and white Greco-Roman world that could be described as “the exclusive heritage of the west”. That construct is a myth. But behind it lay another history: dynamic, diverse, challenging – not the chaste whiteness of the Apollo Belvedere (“the utmost perfection”, as the German art historian Johann Joachim Winckelmann famously said), but the story of the ‘barbarian west’. ■





HIDDEN HISTORIES

KAVITA PURI explores lesser-known stories from our past

// It matters which historical figures we remember in our public spaces //

I HAVE A HABIT: WHENEVER I PASS A HOUSE sporting a blue plaque, I have to stop and look – and I always learn something. The other day, as I hurried down a familiar street in London's Fitzrovia district, a flash of blue caught my eye. I paused to read that: "Young Charles Dickens twice lived in this house 1815–16 and 1828–31, a few doors from the Cleveland Street workhouse." What struck me was not so much that Dickens had lived there, but that a workhouse had once existed so close by. And that's the point of those plaques: to highlight an individual of note linked to a place, and to transport you back in time, connecting past and present.

The blue plaque scheme was launched in 1866. It was the brainchild of politician William Ewart, who proposed the idea of highlighting links between remarkable people and their homes or workplaces. Names are nominated by the public, with the only requirement being that any proposed subject must have died more than 20 years earlier. Originally administered by the Society of Arts, today English Heritage is the official body that decides on the location of each new blue plaque.

Another aspect that has changed since 1866 is the perception of who is considered worthy of note. English Heritage observes that 85 per cent of London's plaques, which number nearly 1,000, commemorate men. Even if all new plaques honoured only women, it would take 50 years to reach numerical parity. Although progress

has been made in recognising significant women from history, English Heritage encourage a wider range of nominations, to reflect the capital's "extraordinarily rich history".

On a glorious day in May, a crowd gathered at a spot just a stone's throw from Hampton Court Palace. Here, in the forecourt of Faraday House (named after ground-breaking scientist Michael Faraday) a blue plaque was unveiled to commemorate Princess Sophia Duleep Singh. Born in 1876 to the last maharaja of the Sikh empire, Duleep Singh, Sophia was a god-daughter of Queen Victoria and lived in a grace-and-favour apartment at Faraday House for more than five decades. She was also an outspoken suffragette, and used the property as a base from which to distribute the newspapers *Votes for Women* and *The Suffragette*. She was a Red Cross nurse during the First World War, too, and a critic of British rule in India. Not only is hers a remarkable life story, but her efforts also helped to change women's lives in Britain.

Back in May, I sensed among the crowd – which included many who had campaigned for this recognition for Sophia – a swell of pride that this important story of the efforts of a British south Asian woman was being honoured in such a way. The blue plaque had a powerful symbolic meaning: who we remember in our public spaces matters, and should speak to Britain's rich history. It's also a way to open our minds to the past, and to people about whom we may know little or nothing.

As an example, while walking in Wimbledon village not long after the unveiling of Sophia's plaque, I saw another above a coffee shop, commemorating the home of Sister Nivedita. Standing in the street, I googled her. And I quickly learned that the woman born Margaret Noble in Northern Ireland in 1867 had campaigned for Indian independence, worked in education reform and joined Swami Vivekananda in promoting the Hindu philosophical movement Vedanta in London.

Although the English Heritage scheme only runs in London, there are other schemes operating across the UK. That Charles Dickens plaque on Cleveland Street, for instance, was placed there by the Dickens Fellowship.

It's important for diverse figures across the country to be recognised, not only the so-called great and good. One example that struck me recently was a plaque installed by Leeds Civic Trust to June Hancock, who during the 1990s campaigned for justice for people who had died following asbestos exposure. Being one of those afflicted herself, she brought a landmark legal case against a factory in Armley. The plaque highlights her David-v-Goliath efforts: "No matter how small you are, you can fight and no matter how big you are, you can lose." **H**

Kavita Puri

is a journalist and broadcaster for BBC Radio 4 whose history series include *Three Pounds in My Pocket*. She is also the author of *Partition Voices: Untold British Stories* (Bloomsbury, 2019)



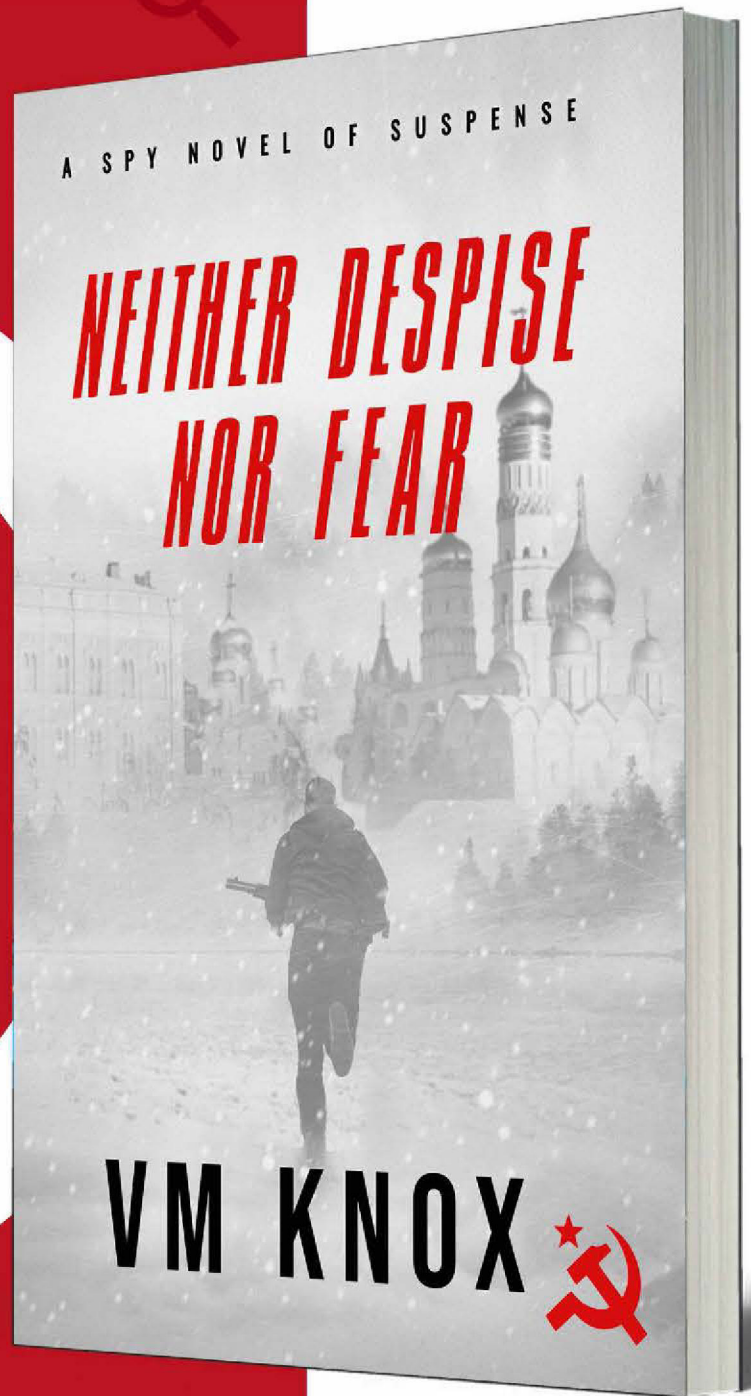
Women's suffrage campaigner Sophia Duleep Singh in 1918, and (above) the blue plaque in Richmond marking her work. Such schemes can broaden our knowledge of the past, says Kavita Puri



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A 1788 portrait of future US president Thomas Jefferson, whose 'scavenging' is noted by reader Ian MacDonald

LETTER OF THE MONTH

Truth and history

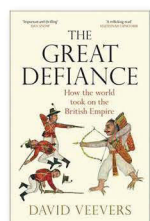
I enjoyed the focus on theoretical approaches to history in the *Conversation* pages of the June issue. I found the suggestion made by David Motadel in his piece – that historians now agree that their work is shaped, consciously or otherwise, by their environment – highly convincing. History and the past are not the same: the past encompasses the 'before now', and 'history' is the accepted methods of analysis needed to understand it.

As the philosopher Richard Rorty argued, humans are unable to detach themselves from their beliefs and existing viewpoints. This is why Motadel's argument is so convincing. We need to abandon notions of empirical truth: although history as a discipline is governed by a set of rules and conventions, this does not mean that our narratives of the past are objective.

This is why I disagreed with one of the points in the interview with Zareer Masani [a member of History Reclaimed, an online project that aims to tackle what it sees as distortions of the past]. He suggests historians should aim to record things as they were – but in my view, that is not the job of the historian. Every source is a positioned account, as are our narratives of them. Historians focus on aiming to prove a thesis, employing certain narrative devices to achieve this – often a beginning, middle and end – meaning that certain facts are discarded or attributed lesser significance.

I am not suggesting that 'facts' do not exist. We know Henry VIII became king in 1509, for instance – but the way in which his reign is described and formed into a narrative by historians will depend on their research aims and objectives.

Jasper Hawkes, West Sussex



We reward the Letter of the Month writer with a copy of a new history book. This issue, that is **The Great Defiance: How the World Took on the British Empire** by David Veevers. You can read our review on page 70

Other views of empire

I read the interview with Zareer Masani with both interest and surprise. It made for fascinating reading. But why the surprise? Primarily because the views expressed are so very much the opposite of those that are frequently expressed in your pages. To give an example: "The British Raj... maintained the aims of clemency, kindness and equal treatment for all subjects."

I am astonished you dared to print such a non-woke opinion – but in my experience, Masani is not alone. When I was in India some 20 years ago, I fell into conversation with an elderly local lady who deduced that I was British. She was quietly nostalgic for the days of the Raj, and angry at the present levels of corruption in India. She was also vociferously grateful to the Raj for not being burned alive on her husband's funeral pyre, a practice outlawed by the British in 1829.

Masani's interview served to illustrate that all systems of government have their positive and negative points, and that reviling them outright is both naive and simplistic.

Michelle Reed, Chelmsford

Culture warriors?

I would raise two points in relation to the interview with Zareer Masani. Firstly, I'd suggest that History Reclaimed is not detached from the culture war surrounding empire, but is instead an active participant. Its website seems to me to be more about justifying the British empire than analysing it. This is indicated by Masani's claim that the British empire "was the most benevolent of all empires we've had so far". This claim is not based upon any serious research on the welfare implications of all empires for all their subjects. It is, rather, an unprovable, partisan and nationalistic sentiment.

Secondly, raising awareness of the racism and violence intrinsic to modern colonialism (an activity condemned as 'woke' by History Reclaimed) is not an attack on the west. It is part of the self-reflection and urge to reform upon which the liberal west prides itself. It helps differentiate the west from the authoritarian regimes that threaten it.

Professor Alan Lester, University of Sussex

Pieces of the past

When future US presidents Thomas Jefferson and John Adams sliced a piece from a chair as a souvenir of their visit to Shakespeare's home in 1786 (*Did You Know?*, July) they were not doing anything considered unusual in those days. As Adams wrote: "We cut off a Chip according to the Custom."

The two were simply engaging in the 'tourist scavenging' commonly carried out by British tourists in the 18th and 19th centuries, when souvenir-hunters took their hammers to Stonehenge and chiselled pieces from the neck of the Sphinx and statues in Greek temples. In 1830, the painter Benjamin Haydon described this as "the English disease", adding: "On every English chimney piece, you will see a bit of the real pyramids, a bit of Stonehenge!"

Many people profited from this trophy-hunting, not least the proprietor of Shakespeare's birthplace who sold slivers of the playwright's chair at a shilling a time. Larger pieces would be more expensive: [18th-century Royal Navy officer] John Byng purchased a chunk "the size of a tobacco-stopper", as well as an entire crossbar. Unlike the pyramids and Stonehenge, however, the chair in Shakespeare's house was unlikely to have been the real thing, and Jefferson was aware of this. He said: "If true like the relics of the saints it must miraculously reproduce itself."

Jefferson himself was a victim of tourist scavenging. When he died in 1826, visitors to his home in Monticello, Virginia made off with pieces of his tombstone.

Ian MacDonald, Essex

Maps and legends

Tim Smith (*Letters*, July) writes that territories are not named for forenames. I'll remember that when next in Georgia,

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➤ Page 54



British general Augustus Ritherdon pictured in Madras, c1865. This month our readers have been debating the role of the British empire

North or South Carolina or Maryland. The first publication of the name 'America' in 1507 specifically says it has been named for Americus Vesputius, who actually went there, and refers to South America. The idea that it was named after a British merchant called Amerike is a fantasy, dating only from 1908. Meanwhile, one of the examples Smith cites – Rhodesia – was named by Cecil Rhodes after himself, meaning it's hardly the best comparison.

Martin Nichols, Suffolk

Voices in the darkness

Reading Joshua Levine's piece on the formation of the SAS (July) confirmed as reality something I had thought might be imagination. I had a memory of listening to a broadcast by General Montgomery following a battle at a place called Mareth [in 1943], in which he noted that Mareth

would be a good name for a girl. I decided to call my doll Mareth as a result, but have not seen or heard the name again until the reference in your feature. Radio's ability to entertain and inform in those dark days was certainly powerful.

Rita Mcghee, Tyne and Wear



GETTY IMAGES

Medical personnel assist the wounded during the Second World War battle of the Mareth Line, 1943. Reader Rita Mcghee has a childhood memory of a report of the fighting

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IMMEDIATE MEDIA

Vol 24 No 8 – August 2023

BBC History Magazine is published by Immediate Media Company London Limited under licence from BBC Studios who help fund new BBC programmes.

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PEACE! (AT THE POINT OF A SWORD)

Pax Romana brought stability and prosperity to Rome's vast empire. Yet, writes **Tom Holland**, behind the dazzling new cities and teeming sea lanes lay the threat of lethal, irresistible violence

Crest of a wave
A relief shows Roman troops crossing the Danube during the war against the Dacians. Victory over "the savages who lurked in barbarous darkness" was the framework upon which Pax Romana was built

AKG IMAGES



In the early winter of AD 101, Caesar's emissary arrived in Rome. Hadrian, a young man of only 25, and a relative of the emperor, Trajan, had ridden directly from the field. He bore missives for the senate. Senators, listening to Hadrian report on the great victories won by Roman arms, could feel themselves transplanted to a more distant and heroic age. Trajan, the man who only three years previously had ascended to the rule of Rome, appeared a stirring old-fashioned figure. The qualities he put on public display – plainness and self-discipline, affability and lack of pretension – were the very markers of an antique hero.

In the Dacians, a martial people of eastern Europe whom he had spent all year breaking to the Roman yoke, Trajan had adversaries who, in a similar manner, appeared conjured up from ancient annals. They were strange and menacing and terrible: men who wielded scythes in battle as though they were cutting corn; who bore standards shaped in the form of dragons; who wrote messages on giant mushrooms. All these were the details reported by Hadrian to the senate.

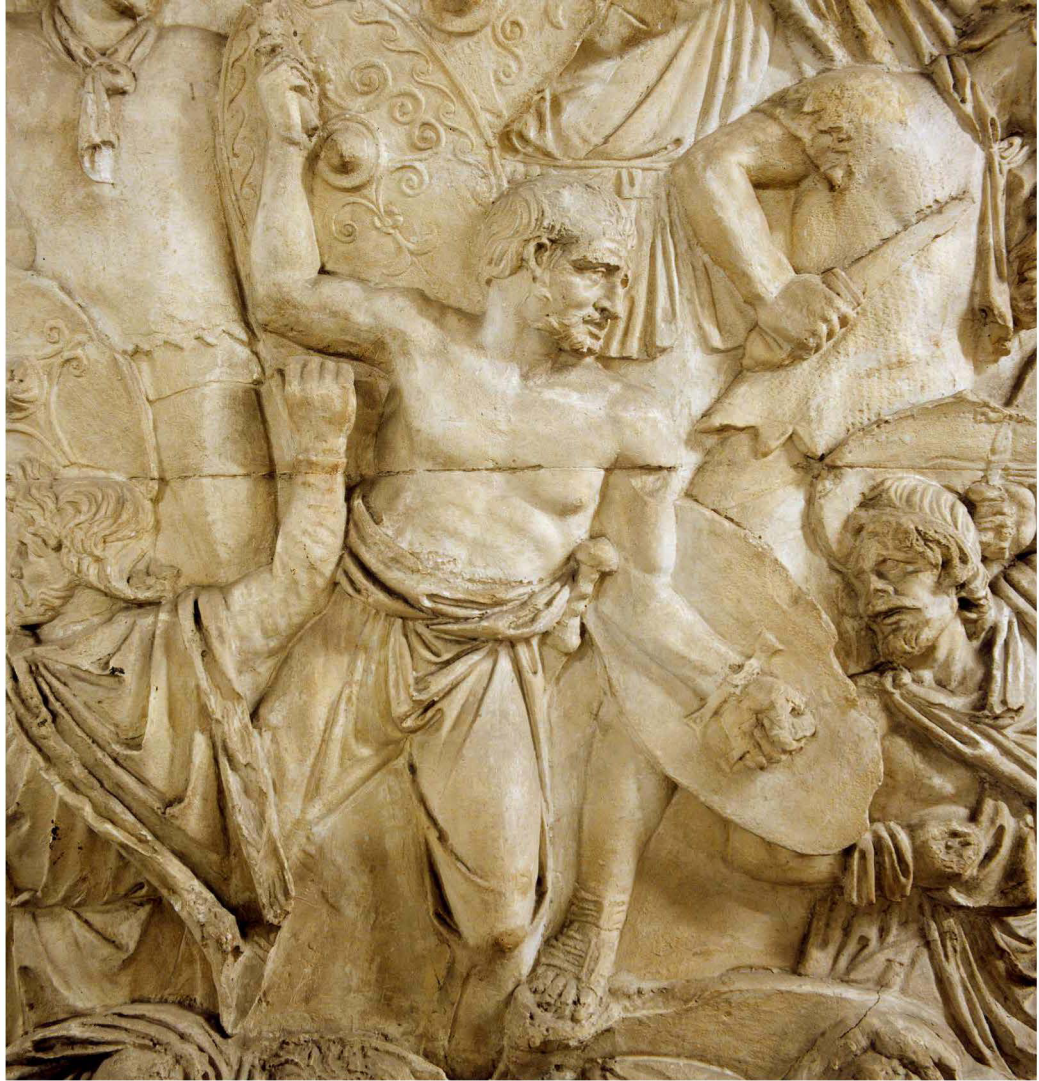
As news of Trajan's dispatches began to percolate out through the city, the Roman people were swept by a mood of excitement such as they had not known for a long while. "For under the rule of sluggish emperors, they seemed to have grown old and enfeebled; but now, under the rule of Trajan, they were stirring themselves afresh, and – contrary to every expectation – renewing their vigour as though their youth had been restored to them."

Battle-hardened upstart

Rome was a city that had been at peace for almost a century and a half by the time that Trajan became emperor. True, back in AD 69, civil war had briefly flared in the capital's streets. Four Caesars had ruled in succession. Blood had splashed the Forum. The temple of Jupiter on the Capitoline Hill, the holiest in Rome, had gone up in flames.

But this sudden eruption of violence had been only a fleeting fever. The victorious emperor in the civil war, a shrewd and battle-hardened upstart by the name of Vespasian, had briskly restored order to the capital. In the centre of Rome, where the meat market had originally stood, he had commissioned an imposing complex hailed by admiring contemporaries as "a building unrivalled for beauty by any in the world": a temple to Peace.

Vespasian's aim in commissioning this architectural masterpiece had not been merely to fashion a monument to his own glory – although that had certainly been a



Tidings of victory

A detail from Trajan's Column shows a German auxiliary soldier fighting for Rome against the Dacians. Victories against these people provoked excitement back in the capital

motivating factor – but to reassure his fellow citizens that the days of war were truly over. The temple, adorned as it was with paintings and sculptures sourced from across the world, proclaimed an order that was authentically global. Not just Rome but her entire dominion had been healed of its wounds. The peace to which the temple had been dedicated was very specifically a Roman peace: a *pax Romana*.

"Empire without limits." This was how Virgil, back in the time of Augustus, the warlord who had presided over the transformation of Rome from a republic to an autocracy, had described the city's global rule. The phrase was an exaggeration: even though the Romans had no word for 'frontier', everyone knew that there were lands not worth the effort of conquering. What was worth conquering, however, the Romans *had* conquered. Peace, imposed at the point of a sword, had come to be celebrated even by the vanquished as a gift from the gods.

Three decades on from Vespasian's accession to power, and the tidings of victory brought by Hadrian from distant Dacia served only to confirm the degree to which the collapse of Rome into civil war during the fateful year of the four emperors had been only a temporary spasm. The legions, whose responsibility it was to keep the dominion

From the Atlantic to Arabia, the icy north to the Sahara, the world seemed radiant with the brilliance of a golden age



Trade centre

A c200 AD depiction of a ship arriving in Ostia. Trajan's port nearby, at the mouth of the Tiber, was designed to turn Rome into the beating heart of a vast mercantile network

won by the Roman people secure against the savages who lurked in barbarous darkness, were patently fulfilling their duty. Across the vast span of the empire, which stretched from the Atlantic to Arabia, and from the icy northern seas to the Sahara (see our map, right), the entire world seemed radiant with the brilliance of a golden age.

The sinews that joined market to market, city to city, province to province held secure. Everywhere the sea lanes teemed with shipping. Never before had the world been so connected. Trajan, whose ambition it was to build a new port beside the mouth of the Tiber, a vast concrete complex where previously there had been only mud and reeds, aimed to make these connections even more secure. To those who contemplated Rome's greatness, her sway appeared a wonder and a miracle. "All who had ships at sea grew rich by her wealth."

The capital was not alone in benefiting from the unprecedentedly vast market established by Pax Romana. The transport of food stuffs, raw materials and luxury goods, conducted across vast distances on a scale never witnessed before, had enabled cities everywhere in

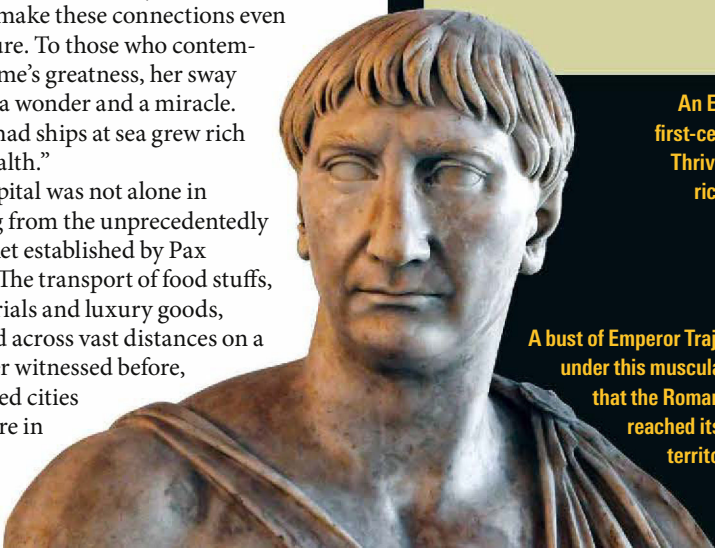


The Roman empire at its height under Emperor Trajan

An Egyptian coin depicting a first-century AD merchantman. Thriving trade routes brought riches to people across the Roman empire



A bust of Emperor Trajan. It was under this muscular ruler that the Roman empire reached its greatest territorial extent



the empire to flourish. Some – Alexandria, Carthage, Antioch – had grown immense on a scale that would have seemed inconceivable to previous generations; but even the most flyblown settlement might boast a library. Famines, when they happened, were notable less for their severity than for happening at all.

Grain, in Trajan's empire, was just one of the myriad products transported, traded and consumed. The sophisticated framework of laws, the network of agents, the shipping, the harbours, the warehouses, everything that over the course of the previous century had enabled the million and more inhabitants of Rome to be fed, profited millions of others as well.

Merchants across the Mediterranean – named by the Romans, proprietorially but accurately, 'our own' – treated the great sea as their lake. Businessmen, cities, entire regions: all could afford to specialise. There seemed no limit to what might be shipped: "gold, silver, jewels and pearls, fine linen, purple, silk and scarlet, all kinds of scented wood, all articles of ivory, all articles of costly wood, bronze, iron and marble, cinnamon, spice, incense, myrrh, frankincense, wine, oil, fine flour and wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, and slaves."

This list of the commodities transported to Rome, compiled by a Judean in the province of Asia, was not intended to flatter. The city, within the limits of her empire as well as beyond them, still had her enemies. Rome, to those who hated her and yearned for her downfall, appeared like a monstrous parasite, swollen with blood and gold.

Baneful luxuries

Even Romans, however, even patriots committed to her service, were capable of looking askance at the wealth of the age. The baneful effects of luxury had been a running theme of Roman moralists.

One particularly mordant analysis of the Pax Romana, written by a young senator named Tacitus, had begun to circulate in the capital even as Trajan was preparing for his invasion of Dacia. The *Agricola*, a laudatory biography of Tacitus's father-in-law, described an estimable record of public service. Agricola was portrayed in it as a citizen authentically worthy of the noblest traditions of his city: a man who, during his lengthy term as governor of Britain, had proven himself in both war and peace, defeating the savage inhabitants of the island's northernmost reaches in open battle, while also doing what he could to redeem the natives from their barbarism.

Yet Tacitus, deeply though he admired his father-in-law, could not help but wonder



The fat of the land

A second or third-century AD wall painting in Ostia shows a merchant ship being loaded with grain. The abundance of such foodstuffs during Pax Romana sent famines into retreat

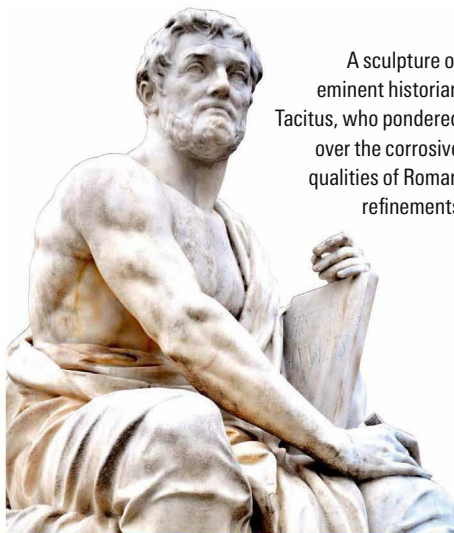
whether Agricola might, in truth, have done the provincials under his stewardship more harm than good. Perhaps, by introducing to the savage Britons all the various refinements of Roman life – baths, fine dining, swanky architecture – he had served to debase them exactly as the Romans themselves had been debased. "For what in their naivety the Britons termed 'civilisation' was in reality a mark of their enslavement."

The fruits of conquest for the Roman people had been manifold: glory, power, wealth. But what if the fruits of these in turn had been servitude and decadence? The question was one that Tacitus continued to brood upon. In the early years of Trajan's rule, he had looked to the vast expanses of Germany, where there were none of the luxuries that had so corrupted and softened the Roman people, and dreaded the worst. For two centuries and more the Germans had preserved their freedom against the full might of the legions. The Caesars, who initially had sought to subdue them, had abandoned the attempt. Limits had been set on the advance of Roman arms. The victories claimed by recent emperors, so Tacitus noted sourly, were "little more than excuses for celebrating triumphs".

Mistress of the world?

Yet even as he lamented the softening effects of luxury, the news brought to the capital by Hadrian suggested that Rome's ancient quality of martial valour might not, after all, be completely dead. Was it possible that at last, under a bold and puissant emperor, she might be ready to resume her career of conquest, and fulfil the destiny ordained for her by the gods? Trajan's record in Dacia offered even an instinctive pessimist like Tacitus the chance to hope for the best: to dream that Rome might simultaneously rule as mistress of the world and yet be true to her most venerable traditions.

Dramatic dispatches continued to be



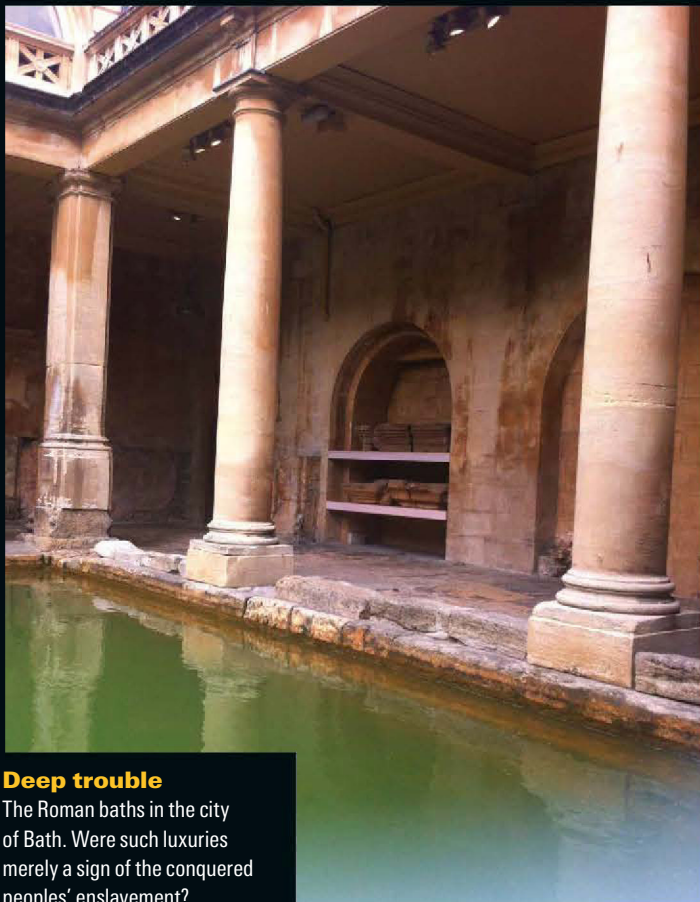
A sculpture of eminent historian Tacitus, who pondered over the corrosive qualities of Roman refinements

Rome, to those who yearned for her downfall, appeared like a monstrous parasite, swollen with blood and gold



Was Trajan Rome's greatest emperor?

Tom Holland will be discussing Rome's golden age on our podcast: historyextra.com/podcast



Deep trouble

The Roman baths in the city of Bath. Were such luxuries merely a sign of the conquered peoples' enslavement?



Rough and tumble A Roman soldier rides over a barbarian. Victory over the Dacians convinced even Rome's harshest critics that the empire had relocated its inner steel



Soft power

Merchants trade cushions in a first-century AD relief. Fears were expressed that excessive indulgence was corrupting the people of Rome



Ill-gotten gains?

Trajan's new forum and market complex in Rome was funded by the spoils of his victory over the Dacians. This vast projection of imperial might dwarfed in scale and grandeur those constructed by previous emperors

Killing machine

Trajan's Column shows a Roman soldier carrying the head of a Dacian in his teeth. Following victory, the Dacian king's severed head was delivered to Trajan in Rome



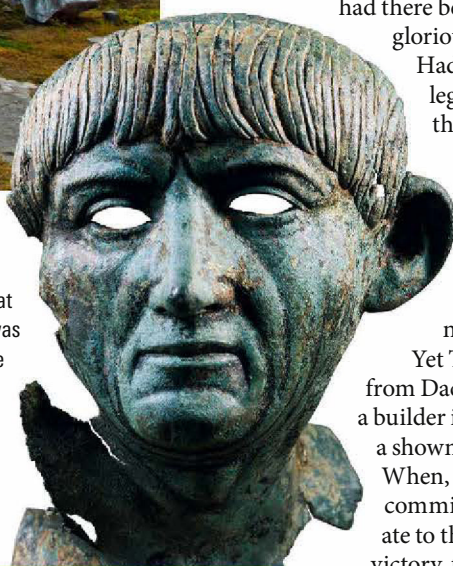
Why was Julius Caesar killed?

Listen to our new podcast series **Caesar:**

Death of a Dictator: historyextra.com/caesarpodcast



Trajan realised that the Pax Romana was meaningless if the Romans weren't proficient at war



No one could accuse Trajan of being soft. Model of discipline and modesty that he was, he had no patience with luxury

brought to the senate. Trajan was anxious to make the detail come alive. Scene after scene was painted in vivid colours. The emperor crossing the Danube in 102 and carrying all before him. Lost standards recaptured. Great rivers bridged. Finally, by the spring of 106, Trajan was ready to close in for the kill. Slowly, painstakingly, remorselessly, he advanced into the depths of Dacia. Every last stronghold he captured; every last bushfire of resistance stamped out.

Then the coup de grâce. The Dacian king, who had fled into the remotest fastnesses of his kingdom, was cornered by a squad of Roman cavalry. Rather than be taken prisoner to grace his conqueror's triumph, he killed himself. His severed head, delivered to Trajan, was sent onwards to Rome, there – before the gaze of the assembled people in the Forum – to be flung onto the steps that led up the side of the Capitoline Hill. Meanwhile, down in the senate house, Caesar's dispatches had been delivered to the senators. They were read out, as they had been five years previously, by Hadrian.

Blood and money

Not since Julius Caesar's conquest of Gaul had there been a feat of arms quite so glorious, so gore-sodden, so lucrative.

Hadrian, who had commanded a legion during the final stages of the war, had witnessed for himself the full scale of his cousin's accomplishment. No one could conceivably accuse Trajan of being soft. Model of discipline and modesty that he was, he had no patience with luxury.

Yet Trajan, on his return to Rome from Dacia, demonstrated himself to be a builder in a long line of builders, a showman in a long line of showmen. When, flush with his Dacian loot, he commissioned a new forum appropriate to the full massive scale of his victory, the complex ended up larger in area than those built by previous emperors combined. Libraries were counterpointed with statues; shopping centres with friezes and arches, and triumphal columns.

So monumental was Trajan's forum, so overwhelming in its impact, that it set the seal on a programme of building begun more than a century before: the transformation of the city centre from an expanse of brick into one of marble. Augustus had embarked on the programme, and his successors had refined it; but it was Trajan, that stern and rugged captain of the legions, who brought it to its ultimate fruition. Surrounding his forum there rose a wall as high as it was

blank. Beyond it, amid smoke and clamour, the contents of chamber pots continued to be flung from attic windows, and gangs of public slaves to farm excrement from cisterns, and the victims of muggers to lie bleeding in squalid side-alleys, and beggars to sit in huddled clusters beside bridges, and miasmas to rise and creep from the Tiber. But Rome, for all its horrors, was like nowhere in the world, nor like anywhere that had ever been. Trajan, that best of emperors, had met the challenge set him by the gods: of ensuring that the Roman people had a capital at last that was truly worthy of their greatness.

Peace was nothing without an aptitude for war. That Hadrian, when in due course he succeeded Trajan to the rule of the world, opted for retrenchment rather than continued expansion, and a consolidation of the empire's frontiers rather than ventures beyond them, did not mean that he ever doubted this. Wintering "amid German snows", he drilled the legions there as though a great war with the barbarians might be brewing. The excellence of his soldiers' discipline served to signal to Roman and barbarian alike that the proficiency of the legions was as formidable as it had ever been: lethal, irresistible, terrifying.

The truest show of contempt that Hadrian could display towards Rome's enemies was not to launch punitive expeditions against them, but to scorn to conquer them. What concern was it to the lord of a spreading garden, after all, that outside its walls, squatting in filth and scratching at their sores, there might lie beggars, envious of the fountains, the fruit trees, the flower beds from which they were barred?

This was why, when soldiers in remote provinces from the capital marked out the limits of Roman rule with timber, or turf, or stone, the existence of such fortifications in no way implied any diminishment in their martial ardour. Quite the opposite. Universal though the Pax Romana reigned under Hadrian and his successors, no one ever doubted what it was founded upon. Peace was the fruit of victory – eternal victory. It was a soldier in the wilds beyond Palestine, scratching on a rock face, who put it best, perhaps. "The Romans always win." **H**

Tom Holland is an award-winning author and broadcaster. His new book, *Pax: War and Peace in Rome's Golden Age*, is published by Abacus in July



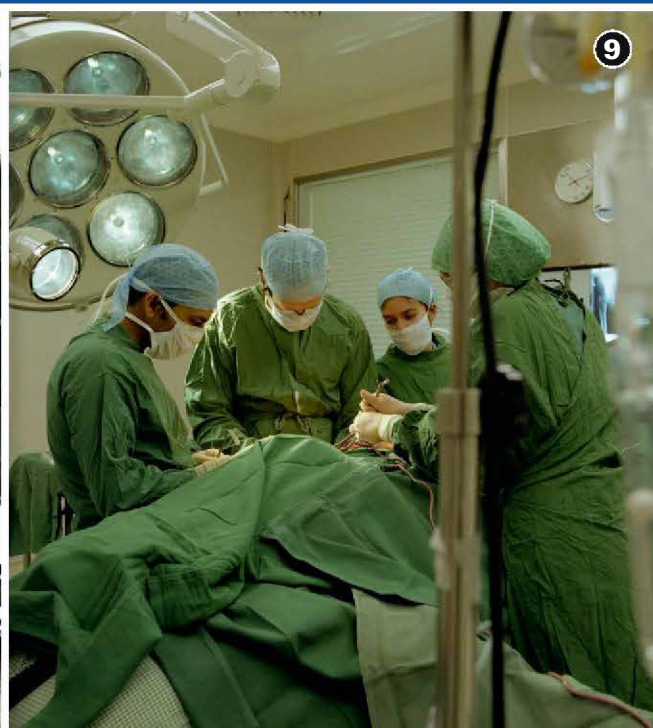
The Rest Is History, a podcast presented by Tom Holland and Dominic Sandbrook, is available on BBC Sounds





How Britain fell in love with the NHS

Since its faltering launch in 1948, the National Health Service has become a cherished part of British society. **Andrew Seaton** explains how it attained that status





ALAMY/GETTY IMAGES/TOPIPHOTO

Infectious enthusiasm

- ❶ A man receives a flu vaccination at a Cardiff GP surgery, 1962
- ❷ Audience members support the NHS at Glastonbury Festival, 2016
- ❸ Jamaican NHS nurses attend the thanksgiving service marking their country's independence, August 1962
- ❹ One of countless posters declaring love for the NHS during the first Covid lockdown in April 2020, this one in a window in Aylesbury
- ❺ A young boy reads with a nurse at Queen Victoria Hospital, East Grinstead, while recovering from plastic surgery in 1955
- ❻ An NHS doctor checks a patient's blood pressure during an examination in 1950, two years after the launch of the NHS
- ❼ Banners adorning the Hackney Book Bus exhort taxpayers to protect the NHS in 1985, during a period of industrial action
- ❽ A doctor immunises children against diphtheria, Portsmouth, 1951
- ❾ Surgeons operating at the Royal Masonic Hospital, London, 1980
- ❿ A ward at the Princess Margaret Hospital, Swindon – the first new hospital built under the NHS, which began treating patients in 1959
- ⓫ Princess Diana meets nurses at Great Ormond Street Hospital, 1992





Word on the street A woman shares her views on a proposed national health service, 1944. Some Britons welcomed the idea, but many were uncertain about a potentially bureaucratic and impersonal system

As Britain's National Health Service celebrates its 75th anniversary this July, two topics look set to dominate the extensive media coverage. The first is the sense of crisis stalking the NHS, illustrated by sky-high waiting lists, troubling financial shortcomings, exhausted staff and extensive industrial action. The second is the NHS's enviable reputation as arguably Britain's best-loved institution.

In 2022, some 62 per cent of people surveyed by polling organisation Ipsos stated that the service was the thing that made them "most proud to be British" – an increase of 12 per cent from 2016. The fun-runs, tea parties and other events marking the NHS's 'birthday' on 5 July speak to its standing in British public life. It's an institution that appears to be part of the furniture – and, at the same time, on the brink of collapse.

No other part of the welfare state attracts the same level of admiration. People do not bake cakes to commemorate the introduction of child benefit payments. Nor do they attend street parties to mark the construction of council estates. Even among Britain's international peers, there are few countries that view their health system as emblematic of their 'national' values. True, Canadians might cite

their country's guarantee of universal healthcare as a point of pride to lord over their US neighbours to the south, but Canada does not celebrate its health service to the same degree as we do in Britain.

Clearly, despite its many and vocal critics, the NHS is widely beloved. But from where did this public support stem? And to what extent have the difficulties facing the service, and the persistent sense of 'crisis' they've engendered, shaped this sentiment over time?

Public affection for the NHS had to be actively nurtured. It was not inevitable that any state-organised universal health system founded after the Second World War would eventually attract such a degree of popular support. Achieving such an outcome took both effort and time.

Supporters of the concept and its implementation – who sat predominantly, though not exclusively, on the political left – furnished the institution with a caring and egalitarian image, helped embed its communal modes of care in everyday life, defended its principles against free-market critique, and established new traditions to celebrate its achievements and history. These efforts – by assorted activists, campaigners, trade

unions, experts, cultural figures and the Labour Party – helped ensure the status of the NHS in Britain today. In turn, they also contributed to the survival of the institution when so many other parts of the welfare state and public industries fell away from the 1970s under Margaret Thatcher and her successors.

State medicine

During the interwar years, the British public relied on health services that stemmed from government, charitable and private initiative. For example, patients needing hospital care accessed treatment in either 'municipal hospitals' (often refurbished Poor Law institutions from the Victorian era, now run by local councils) or 'voluntary hospitals' (which ranged from smaller cottage hospitals to prestigious teaching establishments such as the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh, and were funded by patients' payments, fundraising and endowments). Yet, as surprising as it may appear, in the 1940s public responses to proposals for a 'National Health Service' were mixed.



Labour prime minister Clement Attlee after the July 1945 general election. His government had to tackle public concerns about state-run healthcare



Driving force Labour's minister of health, Aneurin Bevan, c1946. The Welshman oversaw the launch of the National Health Service two years later



Royal approval Queen Elizabeth II visits St Bartholomew's Hospital, London, to open three new buildings in May 1961

In the Second World War, when the 'reconstruction debates' about the nation's future reached their height, pollsters asked Britons what they thought about potential government organisation of medical care. The results were equivocal. Many respondents welcomed the idea, perceiving it as an improvement on the existing services that left considerable gaps in coverage, particularly for women and children. (For instance, the National Insurance system that provided millions of Britons with access to a GP did not cover 'dependants', thereby excluding the family members of those who were insured through their employment.) Others were ambivalent. Significant numbers believed that such plans would lead to a bureaucratic and impersonal system under government oversight – one in which local doctors and hospitals lost their familiarity with and detailed knowledge of individual patients.

As one woman questioned by the social-research organisation Mass Observation remarked: "I hate anything which is controlled by the government." Critical letters to local newspapers decried "state medicine" as a "deadly threat to personal liberty". At the heart of these statements lay an older view that the state should not coordinate something as personal as medical care.

Having secured a landslide victory in the 1945 general election, Clement Attlee's

Britain's postwar government worked hard to portray the NHS as a caring, egalitarian service

Labour Party needed to address these concerns. The new minister of health, Welsh socialist Aneurin Bevan, oversaw the legislation for what would become a nationalised medical system, predominantly funded by taxation and free at the point of use. Although Bevan's tussles with the British Medical Association are often invoked when narrating the drama that surrounded the creation of the NHS, another sort of battle was fought to win the hearts and minds of the British people. Recognising the apprehensions about 'state medicine' voiced during the war, the government worked hard to portray the NHS as a caring, egalitarian service that would support families.

Such an image was advanced through the production of films including 1948's *Here's Health*, a live-action drama depicting a fictional working-class family's struggles to afford care in the months before July 1948. This film's exposition of the benefits of the NHS to those previously excluded from government help with medical costs emphasised the new offer to families. Similarly, government posters, radio broadcasts, speeches and travelling exhibitions affirmed the service's humanitarian credentials, distinct from earlier critical interpretations of government medicine.

Transforming lives

Of course, this promotion was not the only reason for the growth in the NHS's popularity. Following the launch of the new service on 5 July 1948, hospital treatments and doctors' appointments, now available to all free of charge, transformed many people's lives and garnered significant appreciation. Nonetheless, cultural output also played a role in grounding the service. The language of 'state medicine' declined in popular use, becoming voiced predominantly by the service's organised political opponents. The NHS was a single body that people could thank for the care they received – in a way that hadn't been possible with the disaggregated medical system of the interwar years, and which had been

Birth of an institution

Student nurses from Sierra Leone and Nigeria hold a newborn baby during a midwifery course in February 1948.

Thousands of people from Britain's former and soon-to-be-ex-colonies arrived to work in the NHS; many faced racism from patients and staff



Films, TV shows and novels helped cement the NHS's status as a pivotal part of British life

discouraged by the critical views of government medicine invoked during the war.

However, in the first two postwar decades, the NHS suffered as a result of small budgets and a lack of prioritisation by both Conservative and Labour governments. Far from being a golden age of the welfare state, in the late 1940s and 1950s spending on social services stagnated, health languished below the likes of education in government priorities, and funding for new hospitals and general practice facilities was scarce. It wasn't until the 1960s that a significant wave of new hospitals began to appear in towns and cities, a legacy of the financial support offered by the 1962 Hospital Plan.

Nonetheless, even without new facilities, governments and reformers spearheaded a number of changes to the way the NHS worked on an everyday level. These efforts further expanded the service's popularity in its early years. Partly, they improved flexibility in the face of social changes that included an increasingly affluent population, shifting attitudes to gender and sex, and growing ethnic diversity. For example, hospitals gradually extended their visiting hours: whereas in the 1940s patients might have been allowed just one or two hours a week to enjoy the company of relatives and friends, by the 1970s some hospitals permitted one or two hours' visiting each day. Similarly, in response to changing ideas of masculinity, hospitals increasingly allowed fathers to attend the births of their children. There were limits to the extent of such changes, but they still reflected well on a public welfare service that – compared with many other institutions founded in the 1940s – largely escaped widespread denigration as monolithic or unwilling to adapt to social change.

A cultural force

The cultural prominence of the NHS also swelled in the postwar decades. Though the slew of art, films, television programmes,

novels and music featuring the service was not always straightforwardly supportive, it did help cement the service's status as a pivotal part of British life. At the cinema, the NHS provided the background for the risqué and slapstick humour of *Carry On Nurse* (1959) and *Carry On Doctor* (1967) – and in 1975, the prog rock band National Health named themselves after one of their frontmen's spectacles, which were provided by the service.

Cultural material also passed comment on the universal principles behind the NHS. In her 1974 novel *Second-Class Citizen*, Nigerian-born novelist Buchi Emecheta captured the experience of using the service as a person of colour. The protagonist, Adah, feels marginalised because of her class and race on a London maternity ward where everyone else is white. As in real life, gossip spreads easily on communal wards. Yet, for all the challenges she faces, Adah expresses gratitude for the companionship that such spaces could engender in the NHS. The convivial atmosphere of a maternity ward, where women “seemed to have known each other for years and years”, encourages Adah to adopt a “new code of conduct” and gain the confidence to leave her abusive husband.

Emecheta's novel spoke to the connection between decolonisation and the NHS. When the service was launched, Britain's colonies were beginning to secure independence, including India and Pakistan in 1947, Malaya in 1957 and Nigeria in 1960. Thousands of people from the nations of the reimagined ‘New Commonwealth’ journeyed to Britain to work and build lives, and the NHS employed and cared for many such immigrants. In fact, the service's guarantee of universal healthcare would not have been possible without them: thousands of doctors, nurses, technicians, cooks, porters and cleaners from overseas performed

essential tasks during the postwar labour shortage. By the start of the 1970s, for example, almost a third of all NHS doctors had trained overseas, most in India and Pakistan.

Despite their invaluable contributions, such employees were sometimes subjected to racism from colleagues and patients. In rare cases, patients sometimes even asked to be treated by a white doctor or nurse instead of someone of colour – and, shockingly, on occasion NHS hospitals acceded to such requests. As patients, some people from the Commonwealth were met with hostile refusals of their ‘right’ to access NHS services, regardless of their status as British citizens. And in his infamous 1968 ‘Rivers of Blood’ speech, Conservative MP and former minister of health Enoch Powell claimed that hospital beds – along with council housing – were being overrun by Commonwealth immigrants.

As the NHS became increasingly understood as a distinctly ‘British’ achievement, discussions about who belonged in the service and who did not became more sharply polarised. The idea of ‘our NHS’ built support for the institution – but could also lead to the exclusion of those who were not white or who had arrived from beyond Britain's borders.

Shock to the system

The NHS, along with other parts of the welfare state and public industries, faced serious challenges during the economic and political turbulence of the 1970s and 1980s. The oil crisis of 1973 shook the industrialised world, resulting in record fuel prices, soaring inflation and job losses. Successive Conservative and Labour governments struggled to get a grip on the economy in the years that followed, and various political projects migrated from the fringe to present new solutions. The politics of neoliberalism – characterised by a belief in free markets and competitive individualism – gained greater purchase on debate and policy, with politicians, businesses and intellectuals advancing free-market priorities.

By the 1980s, Margaret Thatcher's government was following this political approach. But the prospect of privatising the NHS – which now rivalled pensions as the largest recipient of government welfare spending – represented a major challenge. Indeed, the size, practices and values of the health service comprised an enduring emblem of social democratic politics. The fact that the institution's prominence wasn't successfully undermined was not due to a lack of desire or effort. The prime minister's famous 1982 remark that the service was “safe with us” obscured a longer history of opposition to the NHS.

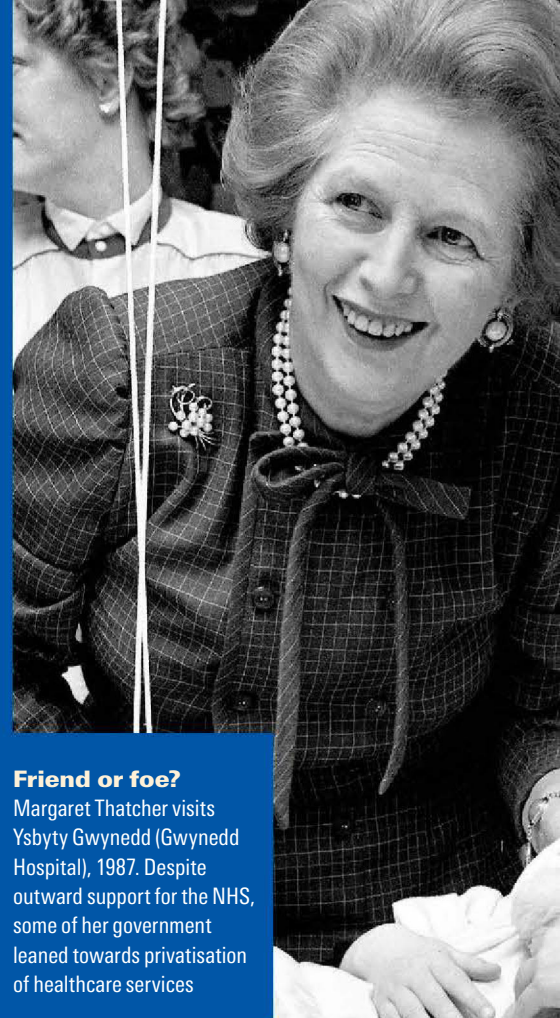
During the 1960s, Thatcher and key members of her government had belonged to

Actor Joan Sims in *Carry on Nurse* (1959). The NHS provided a backdrop and rich material for comedy as well as drama





From dusk till yawn Weary doctors remain on shift in the early hours of the morning following a caesarean delivery at Bath's Royal United Hospital in 1988



Friend or foe?

Margaret Thatcher visits Ysbyty Gwynedd (Gwynedd Hospital), 1987. Despite outward support for the NHS, some of her government leaned towards privatisation of healthcare services

important health policy groups within the Conservative Party that advocated marginalising or even abolishing the health service. On the eve of the 1979 general election, one such group stated that the NHS was “better discarded altogether and a fresh start made in light of knowledge accumulated and experience gained”. In line with free-market principles, this group maintained that a health system based on private health insurance would encourage greater choice and self-reliance, raising more money to spend on medical care in general.

In the early years of Thatcher's government, an internal committee in the Department of Health and Social Security explored such ambitions. They met little success, though, because of the difficulties of replacing a system as large as the NHS, instability within the private health insurance market, and soaring popular support for the existing nationalised system as a uniquely ‘British’ achievement. For the champions of markets within healthcare, reforming the internal structures of the service – rather than its total removal – seemed a viable alternative option. If fortress NHS could not be besieged from without, then perhaps it could be compromised from within. The policies that followed this shift in approach included outsourcing work such as hospital cleaning or laundry to private companies, the introduction of management principles in the NHS that were

Thatcher's remark that the NHS was “safe with us” obscured a longer history of opposition

comparable to the private sector and, in 1990, the implementation of an ‘internal market’ to ensure greater competition.

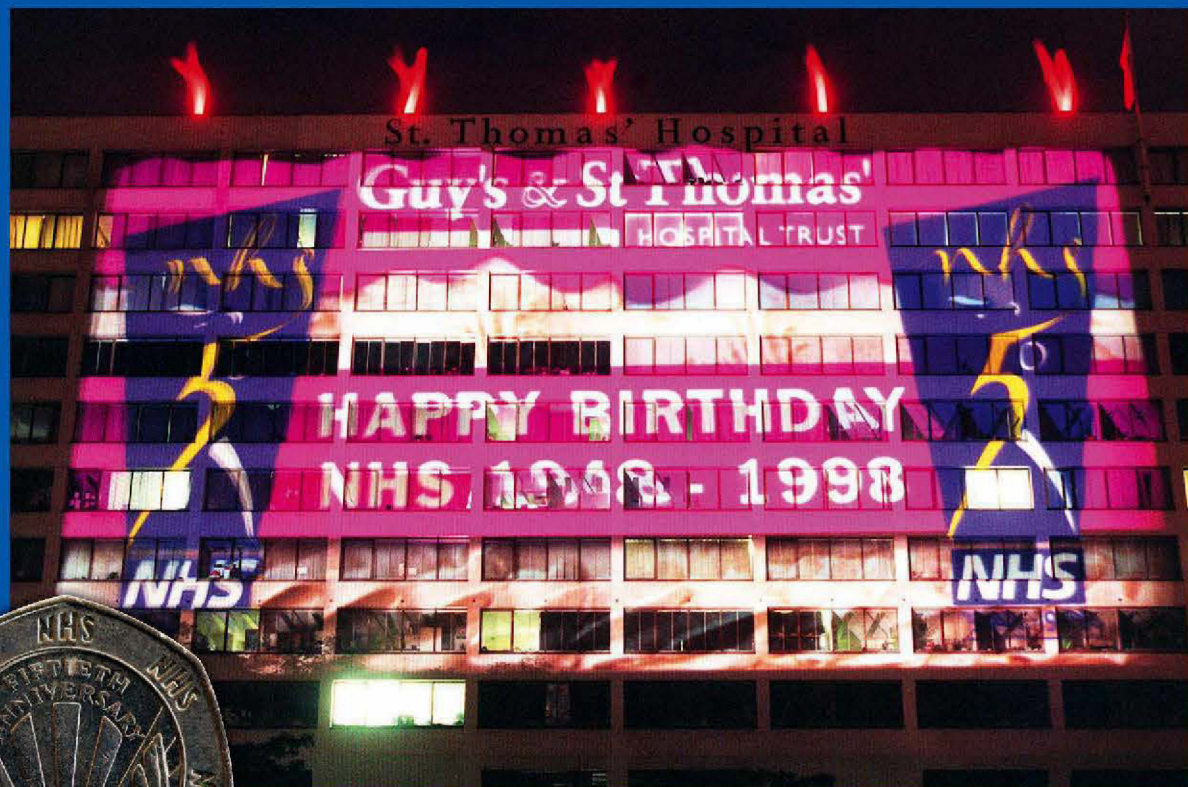
Premature diagnosis?

This marketisation of the NHS's functions from the 1980s escalated an atmosphere of crisis. For many, the legislation that enabled companies to take over catering contracts, or the slick managers employed to help the service follow ‘business principles’, marked a betrayal of the service's founding values. The government's stringency with the NHS's budget increases during the 1980s compounded concerns over its capacities.

To be sure, these policies never went as far as anticipated by their neoliberal promoters in

think tanks and businesses. At the start of the 21st century, most of the NHS's workers remained employed in-house, and it still delivered the overwhelming majority of healthcare to Britons. For all of the newspaper headlines heralding a private sector ‘takeover’ of the nationalised service, companies often struggled to make headway because of the difficulties involved in complex procurement processes, or the pro-NHS campaigners who quickly seized upon any of their perceived failings.

Nonetheless, due to this process of marketisation, predictions of the NHS's actual or imminent demise became ever more common. In a typical example of this sentiment at the end of the 20th century, one protester at a march against budget cuts carried a small coffin emblazoned with the slogan: “NHS died 1985 – RIP”. These claims of crisis focused public attention on the service, and helped build further support for the institution. The 1970s and 1980s represented the transition point in the public standing of the NHS – the moment when it became most central to politics and understandings of British identity. The service's prominent place in the popular psyche was demonstrated by a boom in events celebrating its birthday on 5 July. During the 1980s, trade unions established ‘NHS Day’ as a popular tradition, with family-centred events such as donkey rides and galas combined with protests and petitioning.



Half-century hurrah A birthday message is projected on the front of St Thomas' Hospital, London in July 1998, marking 50 years since the launch of the NHS. The anniversary was also commemorated with the issue of a special 50p piece (left) and events including a garden party at Buckingham Palace

Such events marking the service's anniversary encompassed both a celebration of its principles and a push back against what trade unions described as 'privatisation' under Thatcher's government. When Tony Blair's New Labour came to power in 1997, it smoothed out some of the more radical elements of this cultural practice, and made it a national phenomenon. For the NHS's 50th birthday in 1998, commemorative 50p coins were issued, a garden party was held at Buckingham Palace, a ceremony was staged at Westminster Abbey, and government-sponsored exhibitions took place, confirming the ascent of a popular cultural tradition originally framed by a sense of crisis.

Again, the involvement of trade unions, campaigners and the Labour Party underlined how building wider support for the NHS required the active involvement of its supporters. It wasn't inevitable that the service would retain its prominent place in British life. It was the result of fierce struggles between those who advanced social democratic and neoliberal politics in healthcare, as well as a context of crisis during the 1970s and 1980s.

Alarming prognosis

At least in public, leading politicians in all main political parties now support what they regularly describe as 'Our NHS'. This trend became obvious in the aftermath of New Labour and its escalation of the NHS's cul-

tural significance in British public life. For the service's 60th anniversary in 2008 David Cameron, then leader of the opposition, even visited the 'first' NHS hospital in Manchester to praise the institution. None of his predecessors in his party had undertaken such an act, yet it now seemed natural for him to do so.

Even so, today the NHS again faces serious challenges. Depending on the NHS Trust, these financial difficulties could be made worse by longer-term debts from New Labour's Private Finance Initiative (PFI), which used private capital to build facilities as part of long-term contracts with construction companies, management consultants and private equity firms. The Conservatives initially continued PFI but abandoned it in 2018 due to a lack of cost-effectiveness.

In the wake of the 2008 financial crisis, the government restricted the annual budget increases for the NHS. And since 2010, funding for the service has seen its largest sustained reduction relative to overall GDP since the 1950s. Without annual budget increases – needed for any health system to keep pace with the rising costs of medical care and the growing demand for services – older facilities have not been upgraded, and thousands of vacancies have remained unfilled. On an everyday level, patients' access to NHS services became more restricted as waiting times and lists ballooned. During the 2010s, the number of people waiting for

hospital treatment rose from 2.5 million to 4.6 million – the highest number ever – in England alone. From 2020, the Covid pandemic compounded these difficulties as appointments were postponed and, once government restrictions were eased, exhausted staff struggled to meet demand.

The NHS is not unique in facing these troubles. Most health systems worldwide are experiencing related problems, and their patients express similar concerns. According to an Ipsos 2022 survey of more than 23,000 people in 34 countries around the world, three out of five respondents believed that their own health system was seriously overstretched. Moreover, the NHS has faced moments of serious crisis before, and recovered. It is not impossible that the service – and the wider social democratic principles it represents – might rebound in the future. And the history of the NHS suggests that, in order to address internal difficulties, it will need its supporters among the British public. **E**

Andrew Seaton is junior research fellow in history at St Anne's College, University of Oxford, and author of *Our NHS: A History of Britain's Best-Loved Institution* (Yale University Press, 2023)



The new series of BBC One's **Extraordinary Portraits**, which focuses on NHS heroes, is expected to air soon



Q&A

A selection of historical **conundrums** answered by experts

Does the modern Goth subculture have any link to the Gothic people?

»» The Goth subculture first took root in the UK in the 1980s, when bands such as The Cure and Bauhaus became increasingly popular. It soon evolved to become more than a musical movement. Goths typically favoured black clothes and dark, often crimped hair; many sported long coats, corsets and chokers.

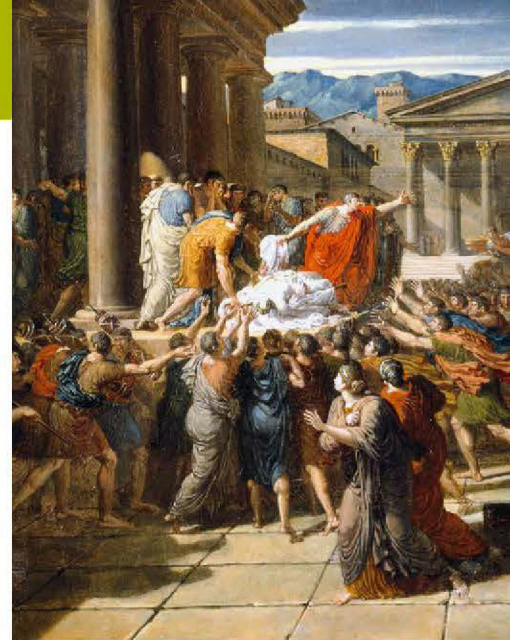
What connection do these Goths have to the people who helped forge medieval Europe? Though it's not known exactly where they came from, those historical Goths were a Germanic people who migrated across the continent, building kingdoms and sometimes fighting against established powers such as the Romans. After the late fifth century they were divided into Visigoths (western tribes) and Ostrogoths (eastern).

Today, ancient Goths are seen as the archetype of anti-classicalism. When Visigothic leader Alaric I sacked Rome in AD 410, it was a hugely symbolic moment in the fall of the classical world.

The word 'Gothic' has been a label for the non-classical ever since. For example, London's Houses of Parliament were built in a non-classical architectural style called Gothic Revival.

The modern Goth subculture also leans on that symbolic frame of reference of the 'other'. The word 'vandal' – the name of another Germanic tribe that spread across Europe from the fifth century – has also been co-opted, though 'vandal' has such specific connotations that no one wants to use that term to describe themselves. Goth counterculture is not inherently destructive – there's no throwing around bins or breaking windows. Being a Goth is just a determined choice to be 'other'. In that sense, modern Goth culture is almost an extension of the symbolic and metaphorical legacy of the ancient Goths.

.....
Peter Heather, professor of medieval history, King's College London



Julius Caesar was famously assassinated on 15 March, a date known to the Romans as the 'Ides of March' – but why?

Why was 15 March, the date of Caesar's murder, called the 'Ides of March'?

»» "Beware the Ides of March!" We've all heard the warning that Julius Caesar didn't heed, but why was it called the 'Ides of March' at all?

The later Roman calendar had 12 months, with the third, March, named for Mars, the god of war. To help people keep track of the date, each month was punctuated by three named days: the Kalends, Nones and Ides. The Ides were sacred to Jupiter, king of the gods, and fell just before the middle of each month. In March, they fell on the 15th.

The Romans themselves, however, argued over the root of the word *Idus* ('Ides'). Some thought the Ides originally coincided with the full moon and that the word reflected ideas of light, sight or fullness, coming either from the Etruscan *itis* ('Jupiter's light'), the Latin *vidus* ('vision'), or the Greek *eidos* ('form'). Others argued that it came from an old Etruscan verb *iudare* ('to divide'), because the Ides were the main dividing point of the month.

.....
Honor Cargill-Martin, author of *Messalina* (Apollo, 2023)



A pair of contemporary Goths (left) and the votive crown of Visigothic king Recceswinth, who reigned AD 649–672. The original Goths' sacking of Rome in AD 410 led to the name being associated with all things non-classical or 'other'

GETTY IMAGES/ALAMY

»» Don't miss our major new podcast series **Caesar: Death of a Dictator**. Turn to page 16 for details

DID YOU KNOW...?

The right to arm bears

A Syrian brown bear became a private in the Polish army during the Second World War. Found as a cub and adopted by the 22nd Artillery Supply Company, the bear was named Wojtek. The soldiers who looked after him were assigned to north Africa to work alongside the British Eighth Army, but the troopship carrying them there banned pet animals. To get around this, Wojtek (seen here immortalised in bronze in Edinburgh, where he lived out his postwar days) was enlisted as a private, with his own paybook and serial number.



Lost in translation

Catherine the Great, empress of Russia from 1762 to 1796, tried her hand at translating Shakespeare. Her version of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* had a title which in Russian meant 'Now That's What it Is to Have a Basket of Linen'. Catherine herself described it as "a free but feeble adaptation". It's certainly a free one, as the characters have Russian names: Francis Ford becomes Fordov and Falstaff, the fat English knight, is transformed into Polkadov, a Frenchified Russian fop.

Not a barrel of laughs

The first person to go over Niagara Falls in a barrel was a 63-year-old schoolteacher named Annie Taylor. Having fallen on hard times, she

decided that this spectacular stunt was her best chance of making money, and threw herself over the waterfall in a custom-made, padded barrel. She survived the experience but later said: "I would sooner walk up to the mouth of a cannon, knowing it was going to blow me to pieces, than make another trip over the falls." **H**

Nick Rennison, writer and journalist specialising in history



ILLUSTRATION BY @GLENMCILLUSTRATION

What are the origins of flamenco?

►► First mentioned in 1774, flamenco – the mesmerising, colourful and sensual combination of folk music and dance which originated in Andalusia in southern Spain – has been declared one of the Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity by Unesco. It includes *cante* (singing), *toque* (guitar playing), *baile* (dance) and *palmas* (handclaps) all blended together.

But its origins, which date from long before the 18th century, are unclear. Usually associated with the Gitanos, the largely illiterate Romani people of Spain, and with the Muslim people of north African origin who once controlled much of Iberia, it evolved in the countryside. It provided entertainment after hard days spent herding livestock and growing crops on the oven-hot Spanish plains.

I have my own theory of where the inspiration for flamenco came from. It relates to the incredible springtime strutting display of one of the largest ground birds in the world – one that flashes its white under feathers in a shimmering mass and then snaps back to its normal earthy brown, somewhat like the actions of many flamenco dancers.

Is it possible that the Gitanos might have adopted some of the flamboyance of the great bustard – at the time, a common bird of the plains – combining it with the extravagant, brightly coloured dresses that the women traditionally wore for special occasions?

No one can be sure, but to my mind, the strutting male bustard could have been the inspiration for the stamping and turning of the flamenco dancer.

Malcolm Smith, writer on heritage and the environment

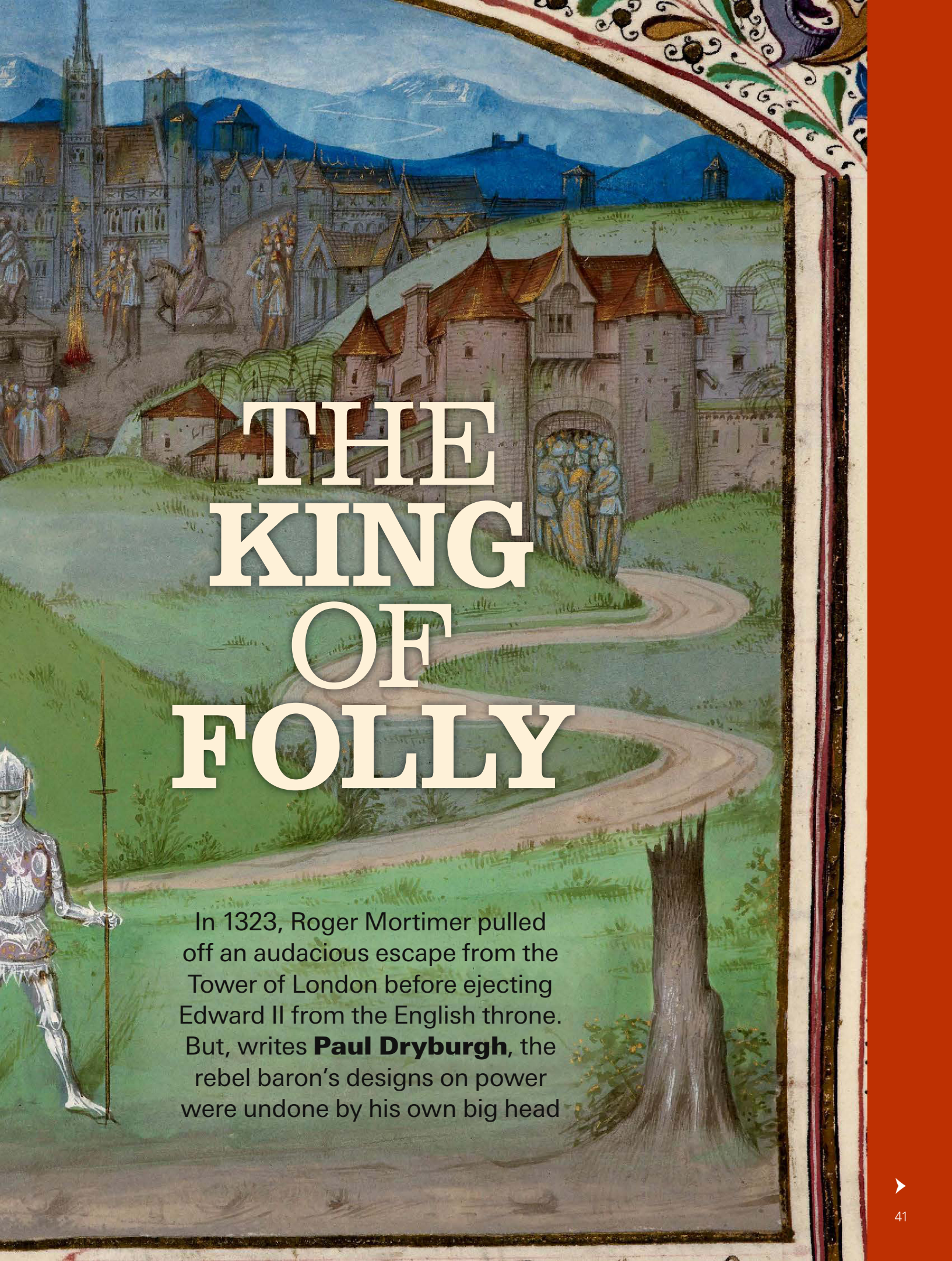


On 24 October 1901, Annie Taylor went over Niagara Falls in a padded barrel – but lived to regret it

Power couple

Roger Mortimer and Isabella of France shown with their army in a 15th-century illustration. In the background, the body of Edward II's favourite, Hugh le Despenser, is being quartered. Roger and Isabella soon stood accused of usurping royal power themselves



The background is a medieval manuscript illustration. It depicts a fortified city with a winding path leading to a large gatehouse. In the foreground, a knight in full plate armor stands on the left, holding a long spear. The city features various buildings, including a large church with a tall spire. The scene is set against a backdrop of blue mountains. The entire illustration is framed by a decorative border with floral and foliate motifs.

THE KING OF FOLLY

In 1323, Roger Mortimer pulled off an audacious escape from the Tower of London before ejecting Edward II from the English throne. But, writes **Paul Dryburgh**, the rebel baron's designs on power were undone by his own big head

As the heat of the day subsided on 1 August 1323, a boozy evening started in the Tower of London. Members of the garrison, including the constable, Sir Stephen de Segrave, settled down to celebrate the feast of St Peter ad Vincula (in Chains), the patron saint of the Tower's parish church. Unbeknown to them, though, one of their number had slipped something into their drink – a drug so strong that “all of them slept at least two days and two nights”. One of the most daring and ingenious escapes in the long history of the Tower was under way.

Alerted to the potion's success, Roger Mortimer, formerly Lord of Wigmore in Herefordshire, crept out into the darkness through a breach in his cell “in a very high up and confined place... out of sight and hearing of the world” into the kitchen that adjoined the king's palace. From there, by means of “ropes ingeniously arranged into a ladder” that had been secretly smuggled into his cell, Mortimer scaled the walls of the inner and outer baileys.

In the colourful retelling of the St Albans monk Henry de Blaneforde, “guided by an angel, [Mortimer] passed over both the first and the second walls, and with the greatest difficulty he came at last to the water of the Thames”. Then he dropped into a boat which conveyed him to a group of accomplices holding horses, which bore him to the south coast. From either Portchester or Portsmouth, Mortimer sailed to northern France before King Edward II, the man on whose orders he had been imprisoned in the Tower, had the merest clue what was going on.

Today, 700 years later, Mortimer's dramatic bid for freedom remains a vivid medieval example of the prison break story so beloved of literature and the screen. More importantly still, the events of 1 August 1323 would represent a catastrophe for Edward II. Mortimer's escape from captivity at the hands of the king triggered a chain of events that would lead to a coup, an alliance between Mortimer and Edward's own wife, Isabella of France, and, it has long been argued, the probable murder of Edward II. It would also see Mortimer become the most powerful man in the kingdom. In short, by ghosting out of the Tower of London, Roger Mortimer changed the course of English history.

Yet the verdict of history would not have been Mortimer's most pressing concern as he tip-toed to freedom past his drugged Tower jailers on that warm August night. Weighing far more heavily on Mortimer's mind was, more likely, the news that Edward II was



Sitting duck Edward II in a manuscript from c1320. His erratic rule and promotion of favourites set him on a collision course with his barons

The drug was so powerful that Mortimer's guards “slept at least two days and two nights”

intending to have him executed for treason on 11 August. That, at least, is what some contemporary chroniclers claimed – and that claim appears plausible, though there is no definite evidence for it.

What we do know for certain, however, is that Mortimer's incarceration represented a spectacular turnaround in his relationship with Edward II. Just a few years earlier, the king and the captive had been the staunchest of allies.

Reviled and murdered

Roger Mortimer was a descendant of Norman knights who had accompanied William the Conqueror across the channel to England in 1066. During the early years of Edward II's reign, he became one of England's leading barons, not only Lord of Wigmore but also a Marcher Lord, one of the nobles appointed by the king to guard the restive Anglo-Welsh border. He remained loyal to Edward during the crisis-riven early years of the reign when an alliance of barons challenged Edward's authority and had his favourite, the reviled Piers Gaveston, murdered in June 1312.

Mortimer's extensive estates in Ireland made him an ideal choice as Edward's lieutenant to tackle the invasion of the island by Edward Bruce (brother of Robert) from 1315–18. Mortimer's local knowledge and military talents were paramount in halting Bruce's campaign to be recognised as king of Ireland as part of the Scots' offensive to achieve recognition of their independence. Mortimer also attempted to build loyalty for Edward's lordship among various communities across Ireland. It seems he may have succeeded – for, on leaving in 1320, he was commended by the Dubliners “for having taken great pains to save and keep the peace”.

Mortimer never returned to Ireland. Instead, he became embroiled in a civil war that would see him fall out with Edward II in spectacular style. At the centre of the dispute were two new favourites of the king with the same name: Hugh le Despenser (known as ‘the Elder Despenser’) and his son, ‘the Younger Despenser’. With the king's tacit support, the two Hughs usurped the precious liberties and legal privileges enjoyed by the Marcher Lords.

Unsurprisingly, the Marcher Lords, with Mortimer to the fore, were furious at this undermining of their powers and quickly forced Edward II to exile the Despensers. However, in a rare show of tactical genius, Edward launched a counterattack in the winter of 1321/22. Assailed on several fronts and abandoned by Thomas, Earl of Lancaster, the leader of the rebellion, Mortimer surrendered to Edward at Shrewsbury in January 1322, hoping to save his life. Following a military victory at Boroughbridge in Yorkshire on 16 March 1322, Edward had many of the rebels, Lancaster among them, put to death, their corpses left hanging as a reminder to those who challenged the king's authority. Mortimer, meanwhile, was incarcerated in the Tower of London.

King Edward may now have felt relatively secure. But Mortimer's dramatic escape from the Tower in August 1323 changed all that. With one of his greatest enemies at large on the continent, likely plotting revenge, the king uncovered numerous conspiracies, real and imagined. The bishop of Hereford, Adam Orleton, was indicted for having abetted the rebels. Mortimer's mother, Margaret, was sent into confinement at Elstow Abbey in Bedfordshire, accused of having held secret meetings on the Marches.

Mortimer's escape also persuaded Edward to act against those with links to the French court – and among those affected was none other than Edward's own wife, Isabella. As sister of the French king Charles IV, the queen lost her lands, household and damsels in 1324.



Would Roger Mortimer have made a good monarch? Paul Dryburgh will be discussing the 'King of Folly' on our podcast: historyextra.com/podcast



This was the first real breach in the royal couple's relationship and, though Isabella at first remained scrupulously loyal to her husband, worse was to follow. Having voyaged to France in 1325 at her husband's request to negotiate peace with Charles IV, by Christmas that year she had instead established a political relationship with Roger Mortimer and his fellow exiles.

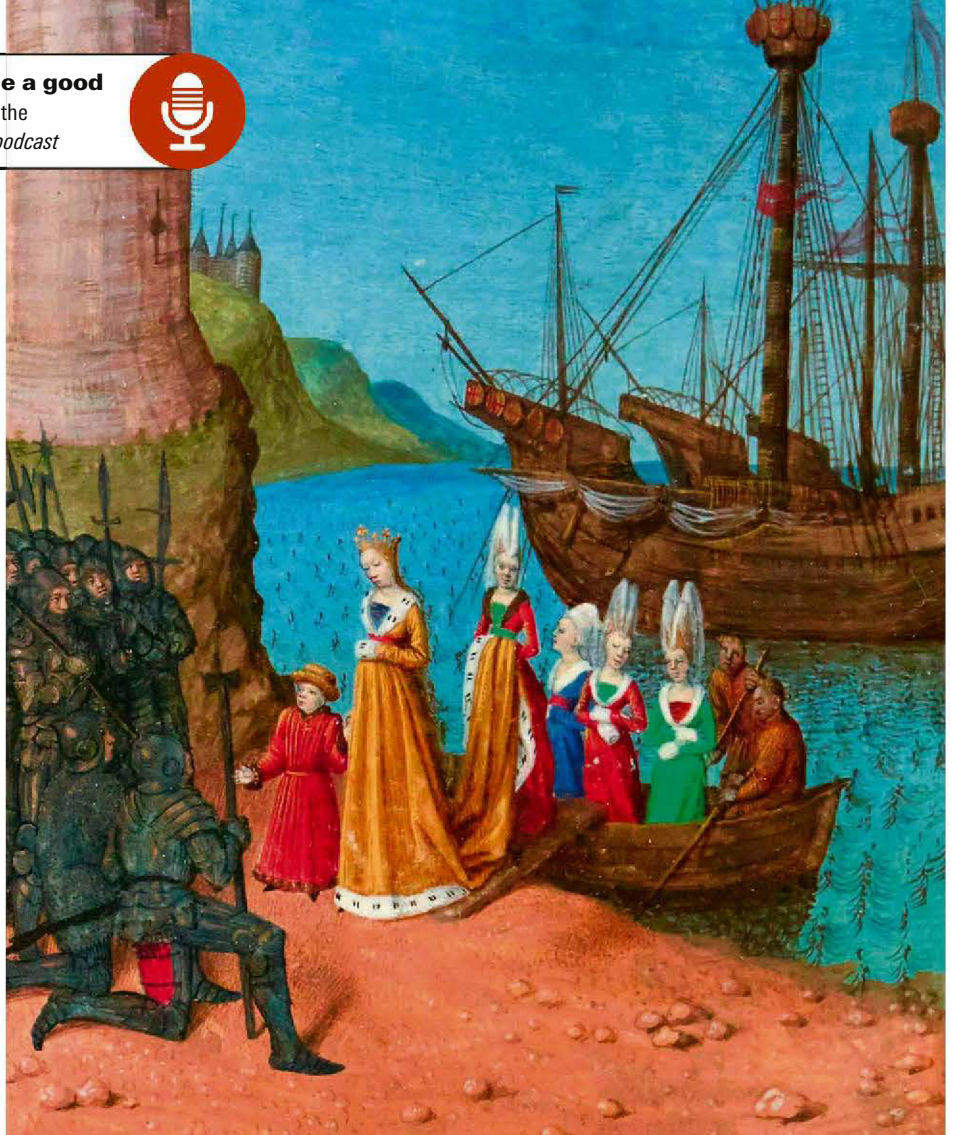
Edward soon made it known that he believed the couple were in a relationship more intimate than simply political (even though Mortimer himself was also married, to Joan de Geneville). Such was the scandal in France that Mortimer and Isabella were forced to flee to Hainault in modern Belgium.

Logistical brilliance

Events now took the king by surprise. On 24 September 1326, a fleet carrying around 1,500 men, which had embarked from Dordrecht at some point over the previous two days, landed in the mouth of the river Orwell in Suffolk.

A combination of logistical brilliance and the disaffection of large swathes of English society brought Isabella quick success. Soon Edward II was on the run from London, and the king's son (the future Edward III) was made keeper of the realm with powers to act on royal business in his father's absence.

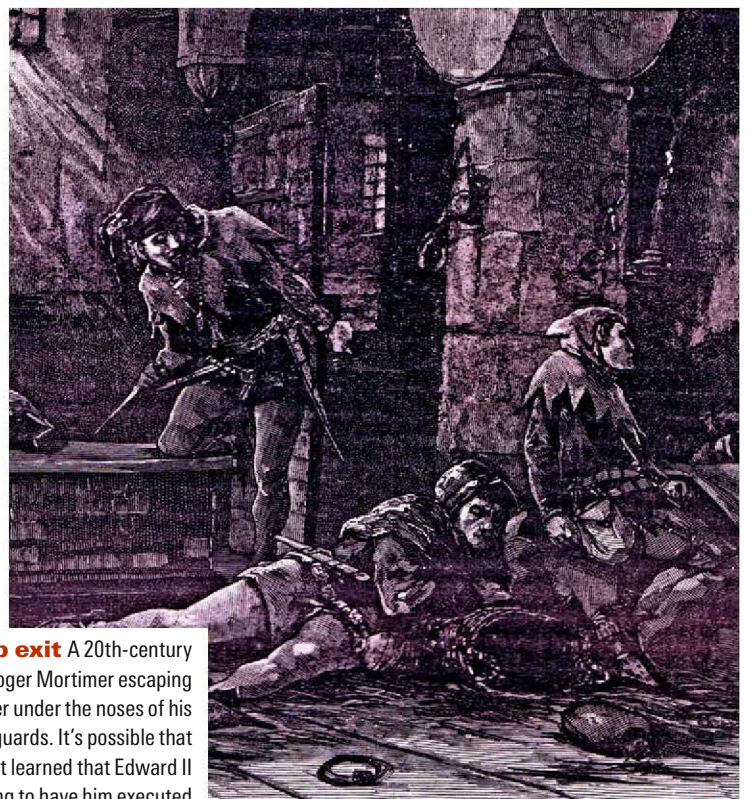
It was Isabella and Roger, however, who operated the levers of power. The queen established a satellite government to give legitimacy to her own strongarm tactics. She swiftly hunted down, tried and executed both Despensers. On 16 November the king himself, who had fled London with a small



Switching sides Queen Isabella lands in Suffolk with her son, the future Edward III, in a 15th-century manuscript. With the help of Roger Mortimer, Isabella would soon force her husband, Edward II, into flight



Thomas, Earl of Lancaster, is put to death at the climax of the barons' uprising of 1321–22. Defeat here saw Mortimer imprisoned



Sharp exit A 20th-century depiction of Roger Mortimer escaping from the Tower under the noses of his drugged guards. It's possible that Mortimer had just learned that Edward II was planning to have him executed

Roger Mortimer: King of Folly

band of loyal men, was captured on a Welsh hillside and thrown in prison.

For many historians, Mortimer and Isabella come as a package. Politically they worked as a well-oiled machine. Their dexterous use of propaganda and management of parliament (the fruits of long and successful military and administrative careers at the very centre of power) convinced the political community to countenance Edward's unprecedented deposition. Edward II's reign had lurching from one disaster to the next – losing Scotland, promoting reviled favourites, alienating the church. So when the king was persuaded to abdicate in favour of his son (who was crowned on 1 February 1327), there was little opposition.

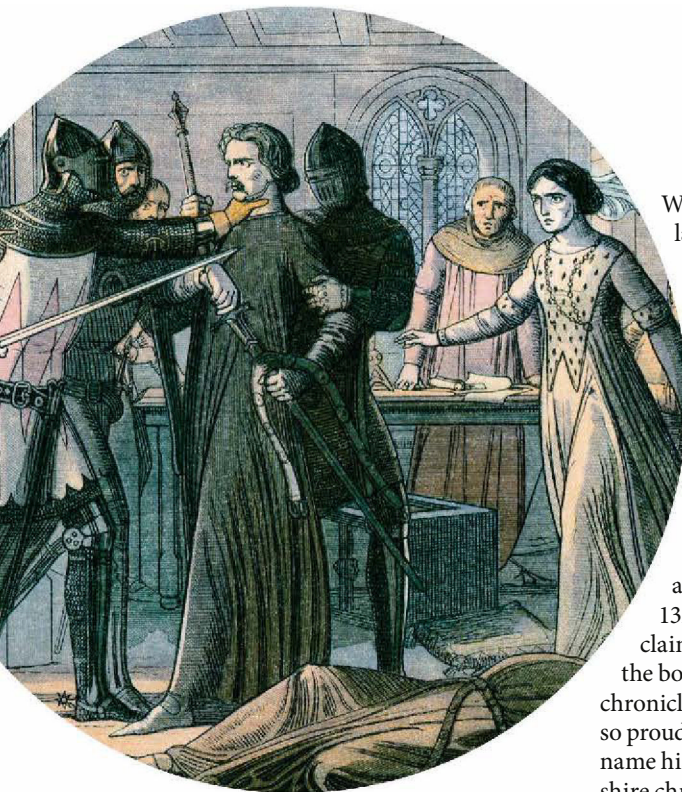
Foolish arrogance

If the country expected Mortimer and Isabella to eschew the favouritism, the arrogance and the profligacy that had dogged Edward II's reign, it was to be disappointed. Over the next three years, Mortimer and Isabella were said to have "usurped royal power and the treasure of the realm and they held the king under their subjection". Mortimer would take precedence over the young king in public, rising before him and walking paces ahead of him. In September 1329, Mortimer hosted the court at remote



Empty gesture Edward III's coronation shown in a 15th-century manuscript. The young king may have worn the crown but, for the first three years of his reign, he didn't operate the levers of power

Mortimer took precedence over the king, rising before him and walking paces ahead of him



Turning point

Edward III's men seize Mortimer at Nottingham Castle. The king made sure that his captive wouldn't escape from the Tower a second time

Wigmore, putting on a display of largesse remembered for centuries, hosting a lavish Arthurian tournament and dispensing gifts to the king and queen mother. Even to those closest to him, Mortimer was now displaying foolish arrogance, his son Geoffrey memorably calling him the 'King of Folly'.

And his arrogance grew. Mortimer gained vast new estates across the Marches and in Ireland, and, by his ennoblement in October 1328 as the 'Earl of March', implicitly claimed authority over the lordships on the borders of England and Wales. One chronicler suggested Mortimer had "become so proud that he would lose and forsake the name his ancestors had before". The Oxfordshire chronicler Geoffrey le Baker of Swinbrook even claimed that "Roger Mortimer, lover of the queen, master of the king, desired to extinguish the royal bloodline and usurp the throne for himself".

At the heart of such accusations is the fate of Edward II. Whether we believe that Edward was murdered at Berkeley Castle (which was what many of us were taught at school) or escaped to live out his life on the continent (as has also been claimed), the influence of Roger Mortimer is ever present. In the former scenario, Mortimer prompted Edward's 'killers' to suffocate their charge on 21 September 1327. In the latter, Mortimer possibly maintained the captive king alive to entrap his own detractors in treasonous plots, an example being Edmund, Earl of Kent, the late king's half-brother, who was executed in March 1330 for trying to liberate 'Edward' from Corfe Castle in Dorset.

A son takes revenge

For Edward III, Edmund's death appears to have been the final straw. That Mortimer could engineer the execution of a member of the royal family with impunity convinced the young king that the Earl of March had to go. And so, three and a half years into his reign – with his 18th birthday fast approaching – Edward struck.

With parliament gathering at Nottingham in October 1330, Edward led a small, secret band through the tunnels under the castle. When they reached Queen Isabella's bedchamber, they killed two of Mortimer's henchmen and arrested the Earl of March. A horrified Isabella looked on and supposedly cried out: "Dear son, have pity on gentle Mortimer!"

No such pity was forthcoming. With his own position far from secure, Edward could not risk another escape. And so he had Mortimer transported to the Tower where a special cell was constructed for him, overlooked by the king's own chamber.

Condemned in parliament for multiple crimes including usurping royal power, Mortimer was hanged at Tyburn on 29 November 1330. His body was cut down and initially sent to the nearby Franciscan friary. Intriguingly, though, petitions from Mortimer's widow, Joan, in 1332 reveal that the corpse had been spirited away to Coventry, a town in the custody of Queen Isabella, where she might conceivably have been able to pay it private devotion.

So ended one of medieval England's most remarkable lives. Roger Mortimer, among the most politically skilled men of the early 14th century, was ultimately brought down by his arrogance and towering ambition. The kingdom had once lain at his feet. His great folly was to throw it all away. **E**

Paul Dryburgh is an archivist and historian specialising in Britain in the 13th and 14th centuries



ESCAPE ARTISTS

Five other inmates who tried (and sometimes failed) to break-out from the Tower

Lady Winifred Herbert smuggled her husband, William Maxwell, out of the Tower disguised as a maid



1 A wife to the rescue

On 22 February 1716, **Lady Winifred Herbert** walked out of the Tower of London accompanied by her maids. Little did the guards know that one of those maids was her husband. William Maxwell, 5th Earl of Nithsdale, was a leader of the 1715 Jacobite rising in support of the Old Pretender. When the rising

failed, he was captured and sentenced to death for treason. And that's the fate he would have faced if his wife – who visited him regularly in the Tower – hadn't smuggled him out dressed as a woman. Maxwell escaped to Calais and then to Rome, where he lived out his life in poverty.

2 A drink for the road

In February 1101, **Ranulf Flambard**, bishop of Durham, fled the Tower by a rope ladder smuggled into his cell in a flagon of wine. Flambard had plied his guards with alcohol and scaled the walls while they slept.

Flambard had been imprisoned in the Tower by King Henry I on charges of financial extortion. On his escape, he fled to Normandy where he assisted an invasion of England by Henry's brother Robert Curthose. The invasion failed, but Flambard was pardoned and allowed to return home to concentrate on his bishopric.

A depiction of Bishop Ranulf Flambard, who used alcohol to elude his jailers



3 The mime (and escape) artist

John Gerard was a prominent Jesuit active during Elizabeth I's reign, who was captured in April 1594, and eventually moved to the Tower of London. There, by communicating through mime from his cell window, he befriended another prisoner, John Arden, whose wife smuggled a rope into his cell. Despite badly damaged hands from the torture he had endured, Gerard (pictured) and Arden escaped on 5 October 1597 by swinging over the Tower ditch into a waiting boat.

Gerard, who was suspected of involvement in the gunpowder plot, later fled to the Low Countries and eventually died in Rome.



4 Swimming, splashing and a final straw

Edmund Neville tried to escape the Tower three times – and failed on every occasion. Imprisoned in 1584, after being implicated in a plot to assassinate Elizabeth I, Neville first filed the bars of his cell window until he could squeeze out, but was betrayed by his malodorous appearance after swimming in the Tower moat. He retried two years later but was recaptured when his splash-landing alerted the guards.

Six years on, Neville crafted a straw mannequin dressed in his clothes to fool his gaolers. It fooled no one. Neville was released in 1598, no longer considered a danger, and died in Brussels decades later.

5 A pirate's rise and fall

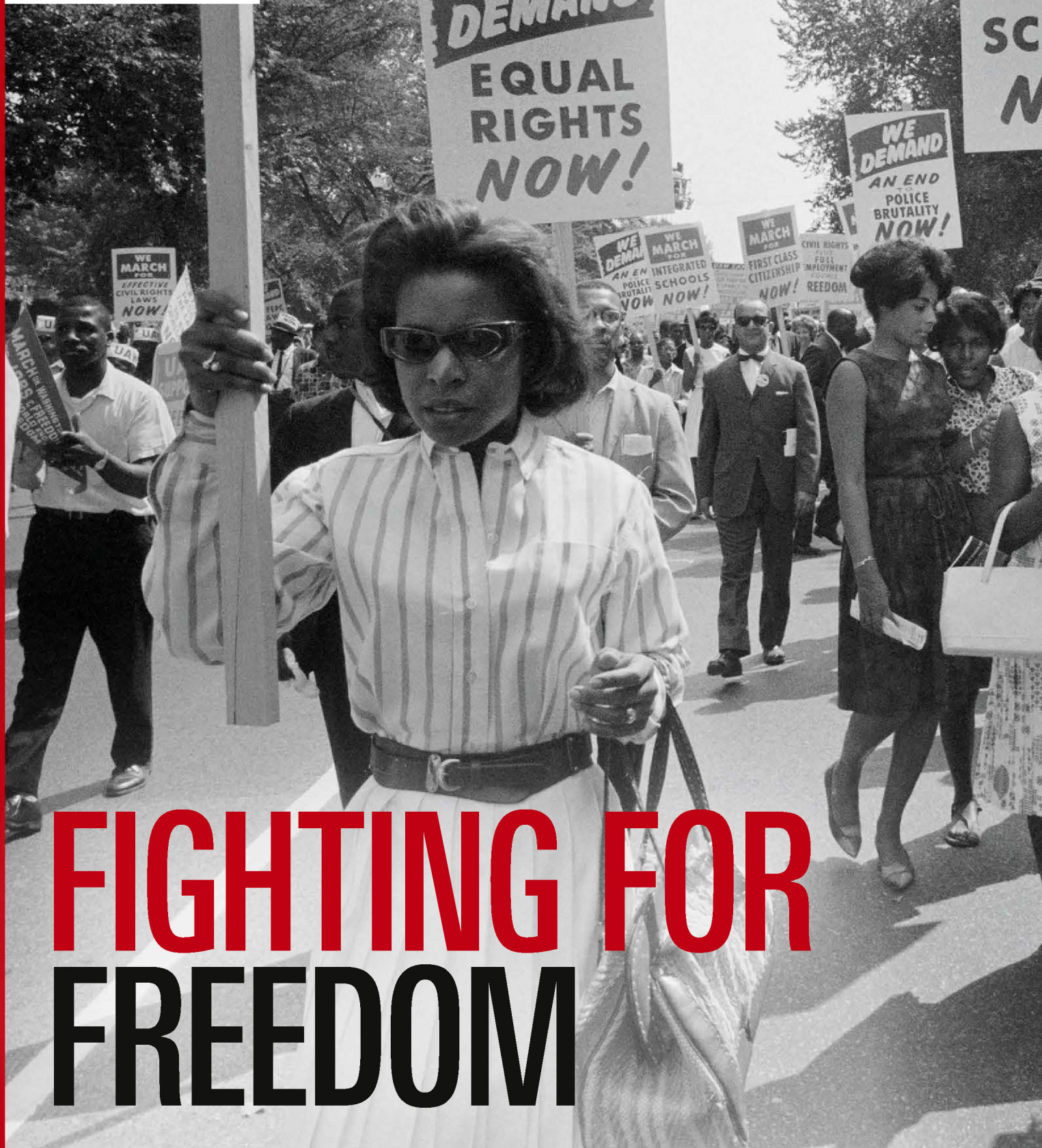
Like Edmund Neville, the Thames pirate **Alice Tankerville** also failed in her attempt to escape the Tower, but her fate was far more grisly.

Tankerville had been imprisoned in the Tower for her part in a heist of a royal ship in 1531. Shackled in her cell, she persuaded her gaolers – whom she had befriended while visiting her common-law husband, John Wolfe, in his cell before her own incarceration – to aid her escape. On 23 March 1534, dressed as a man, Tankerville scaled the Tower walls with a rope. But the watchmen spotted her and she was recaptured. Tankerville and Wolfe were hanged in chains and drowned by the rising tide.

Day of reckoning

Protesters march on Washington for jobs and freedom, 28 August 1963.

The 250,000-strong crowd that converged on the US capital that day helped turn the civil rights campaign into an international cause celebre



FIGHTING FOR FREEDOM



GETTY IMAGES

The civil rights movement saw hundreds of thousands of Americans rallying to the cause of racial equality. **Rhiannon Davies** has spoken to several historians of the campaign for a new podcast series. Here she revisits five key moments in the struggle

AUGUST 1955

A lynching jumpstarts the civil rights movement

Teenager **EMMETT TILL**'s brutal murder exposed the savagery of southern racism as never before

On 20 August 1955, Mamie Till embraced her 14-year-old son, Emmett, one final time, before ushering him on to the train that would take him out of his native Chicago into the heart of the Deep South. He was travelling to Mississippi, intending to soak up the last of the summer sun and visit his extended family, before returning home.

As Emmett's train travelled south, he was entering a different world. Devery Anderson, the author of a biography of Till, told me: "In Chicago and in the north, there was certainly still racism. But the difference between the north and the south was that in the south it was done by statute."

For decades, the southern states had been the land of the Jim Crow laws, where segregation in all aspects of life was legally sanctioned. In 1896, this practice had been rubber stamped at the highest federal level, as the US supreme court had ruled that providing "separate but equal" facilities to white and black Americans was constitutional.

However, this meant far more than simply restricting what water fountains people could drink at, or what restaurants they could frequent. Adriane Lentz-Smith, associate professor of history at Duke University, says: "Jim Crow was sending your child to the store and not knowing if they were going to come back home. It was getting killed because you stepped into an elevator without realising a white woman

was in there, and were accused of rape. People need to understand how ghastly and all-consuming it was."

Dragged from his bed

On 24 August Emmett Till and his cousins drove to the Bryant Grocery & Meat Market, in the town of Money, Mississippi.

The details of what happened when Emmett stepped inside the grocery store remain hazy, as the eyewitness accounts differ drastically. However, Anderson – who has pored over the various testimonies – says that after leaving the store, Emmett whistled at the white store clerk, Carolyn Bryant, which violated southern social protocols. This drove her into such a rage that she went in search of a gun. The teenagers fled – but Carolyn didn't forget what Emmett had done.

Three days later, in the dead of night, a group of men dragged the 14-year-old boy out of bed and bundled him into a truck. They then beat him, shot him, and tossed his



"Jim Crow was sending your child to the store and not knowing if they would come back home"



Dividing line A sign at a bus station in Rome, Georgia, 1943. In 1896, the US supreme court had ruled that providing "separate but equal" facilities to white and black Americans was constitutional

TOP/PHOTO/BRIDGEMAN



A mother's grief Mamie Till (centre) at Emmett's burial at Alsip, Illinois on 6 September 1955, and (inset) with her son in c1950. By insisting that Emmett's body was visible in its casket, "Mamie was able to put southern racism on display in a way that nobody ever had", says Devery Anderson

body into the Tallahatchie river. He was found several days later.

Emmett's murder was part of a horrific history of lynchings in the south, with Lentz-Smith noting that lynchings were akin to "carnivals or county fairs, with people selling lemonade and taking away pieces of bodies as souvenirs".

So why did Emmett's fate in particular help bring about the civil rights movement? Anderson explains that Emmett's mother, Mamie Till, was instrumental. When Mamie saw her son's body, she was determined not to hide him away. Instead she insisted on having an open casket, and displayed his body for five days. In that time,

Anderson says, "Tens of thousands of people filed past the casket, and saw in person what had been done. Mamie was able to put southern racism on display in a way that nobody ever had."

As the press got hold of the story, people across America and beyond were horrified by Emmett's fate. In late September 1955, their outrage reached a fever pitch, when the two men who had led the attack – Carolyn's husband, Roy Bryant, and his half-brother JW Milam – were acquitted of murder by an all-white jury. According to Anderson: "After the injustice of Emmett Till, people needed something to channel all their anger and energy into."

LOOK OUT FOR OUR NEW CIVIL RIGHTS PODCAST SERIES



The US civil rights campaign is the focus of a new podcast series coming soon to *HistoryExtra.com*. The series will feature interviews with historians and eyewitnesses to a movement that changed the face of America.



The murder that transformed America Read our article about the legacy of Emmett Till at: [historyextra.com/emmett-till](https://www.historyextra.com/emmett-till)



DECEMBER 1955

Community action puts the brakes on segregation

ROSA PARKS' refusal to give up her bus seat ballooned into a 381-day-long boycott that inspired the nation

Two hundred miles east, in Montgomery, Alabama, a 42-year-old black activist called Rosa Parks was devastated by the news that Emmett Till's murderers had walked free. On 1 December 1955, she finished her shift at the department store where she worked and waited to catch the bus home.

At the time, transport was segregated in the south. Although this arrangement was meant to provide "separate but equal" facilities to passengers of all races, in reality black people received the worst deal. Mia Bay, the author of *Traveling Black: A Story of Race and Resistance*, told me: "Especially in the early days of buses, there was a worst seat on the bus: the seat over the wheel at the back. It was much higher than the other seats and had no springs. From the very beginning, bus companies would relegate black travellers to these unpleasant back seats that people wouldn't sit in voluntarily." Black passengers could also be made to vacate their seat at any time, if a white passenger got on and needed somewhere to sit down.

When Rosa Parks boarded the bus that evening, the ride home began as any other. But, when a white passenger got on and the driver asked Parks to move, she refused. According to Jeanne Theoharis, the author of *The Rebellious Life of Mrs Rosa Parks*, this refusal grew out of her long history of

challenging racial inequality.

"Rosa Parks says she thought about Emmett Till; she thought about her grandfather, who had sat out at night in 1919 to protect their family home from Klan violence, and she refused." She was arrested and taken to jail.

News of her situation soon reached the city's activist community, and a group called the Women's Political Council arranged a boycott of the city's bus system for that Monday, to protest Parks's arrest. Although they were nervous about how many people would join the protest, it was hugely successful: 90 per cent of black Americans who normally travelled by bus in the city didn't that day. Buoyed by this, they decided to extend the boycott.

Threat of arrest

According to Theoharis, organisation was key in sustaining the boycott's success: "They set up an incredible carpool system and 40 pickup stations around Montgomery, and at the height of the boycott they were giving 1,000 to 1,500 rides per day. This was a massively organised system." Although the protesters faced the threat of arrest or trouble with the police, they didn't give in. After 381 days of boycotting, Montgomery's buses were desegregated on 21 December 1956.

Direct action soon exploded across the nation, as the newly formed Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) moved from sit-ins at lunch counters and restaurants to voter registration drives and freedom schools. Adriane Lentz-Smith says:

"This on-the-ground organising turned isolated court rulings into a full-blown civil rights movement"



Voting with their feet

Women walk to work during the Montgomery bus boycott, which enjoyed overwhelming support from the city's black community



Game changer Rosa Parks in December 1956 following the supreme court ruling prohibiting segregation on the bus network. Her stand inspired direct action across America

"This on-the-ground organising turned isolated court rulings [like 1954 Brown vs Board of Education, which declared segregated schooling to be unconstitutional] into a full-blown civil rights movement. The key to the story doesn't lie in individual moments of protest: it lies in the coordinated effort and sustained vision of people who created possibility out of protest."

Jeanne Theoharis adds: "Parks's activism continued after the boycott. Unable to find work and still receiving death threats, she was forced to leave Montgomery for Detroit, where she fought racism for 40 years."

AUGUST 1963

A protest march piles pressure on the president

When a 250,000-strong crowd descended on Washington DC to march for jobs and freedom, they were entranced by **MARTIN LUTHER KING JR's** dream for a different future



Dream scenario

Martin Luther King delivers his 'I Have a Dream' speech, arguably *the* iconic moment of the entire civil rights campaign

One of the figures who was catapulted to fame as a result of the Montgomery bus boycott was a previously unknown southern preacher, Martin Luther King Jr. He first came to prominence when he was voted head of the Montgomery Improvement Association, the community group that helped drive the boycott on.

But King took what could have been a local leadership role and transformed it into one of international importance. Jonathan Eig, who has written a new biography of the civil rights leader, says: "He was meant to be the person speaking to the media and leading church meetings, but over time it became clear that he was more than just a spokesman – he was also the strategic leader."

Media magnet

After the success of Montgomery, the world was watching King – and he was determined to make the most of it. He supported protests across the country, from Albany to Atlanta. Eig says: "King knew that in some ways his greatest role was as a loudspeaker. The media would come wherever he went: he would get arrested, or lead a rally, or lead a march if that was what was needed."

And in 1963 he lent his voice to one of the most famous protest marches ever staged: the March on Washington. The brainchild of veteran labour leader and activist A Philip Randolph, the march was designed to draw attention from far and wide, and twist President John F Kennedy's arm over the issue of backing civil rights legislation.

On 28 August 1963, a multiracial crowd of more than 250,000 protesters flocked to Washington DC to

march for jobs and freedom. I spoke to Clayborne Carson, the Martin Luther King Jr centennial professor emeritus at Stanford University, who attended the march as a 19-year-old student. He recalled: "It was the most exciting event of my life at that point."

A range of speakers (all of whom were men) took to the podium. But it was one figure in particular whose words went down in history: the last speaker, Martin Luther King. When Carson heard King deliver his now famous 'I Have a Dream' speech at the march, he said: "I was very impressed – I had never heard anyone speak like that. But of

course, just like everybody else, I didn't know it was going to be a speech that people would remember 50 years later."

The speech went on to become one of the most iconic moments of the civil rights movement. It began with King pointing out that, instead of honouring its "sacred obligation", America had "given the Negro people a bad check". But, according to Carson, it's what King said in the second half of the speech that secured its place in history – and that's because he didn't stick to the script. "He gave a talk that he had been practising for months, and if he'd stopped there it

would have been a decent speech, but we probably wouldn't be talking about it today. But then he just went extemporaneous – and that's when he starts getting into his dream."

King's powerful oratory, where he shared his hopes "that one day right down in Alabama little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers", was broadcast across the country. It resonated deeply with many, and the calls for civil rights legislation grew to a deafening roar.



People power

More than 250,000 people gather around the Lincoln Memorial on 28 August 1963. The March on Washington turned up the heat on President John F Kennedy to back civil rights legislation



Seal of approval President Lyndon B Johnson signs the Civil Rights Act, with Martin Luther King standing behind, 2 July 1964. Johnson contended that passing the act was the best way to pay homage to John F Kennedy

JULY 1964

Landmark legislation promises a brighter future

LYNDON B JOHNSON's signing of the Civil Rights Act was hailed as a seismic moment in the war on discrimination

When the March on Washington finished, a string of civil rights leaders including King headed to the White House, to meet with John F Kennedy. Although he had come to power on a ticket of civil rights, actual progress delivering a civil rights bill was slow. Tomiko Brown-Nagin, dean of the Harvard Radcliffe Institute, told me this was because "Kennedy had been beholden to the segment of Congress who were fiercely opposed to civil rights legislation, and in fact he held off supporting such a bill because he was captive to those individuals".

However, Kennedy's assassination on 22 November 1963 transformed the situation. His vice-president, Lyndon B Johnson, came to power – and took up the mantle of championing civil rights legislation. Arguing that passing the act was the proper way to pay homage to Kennedy's legacy, Johnson overcame the protests of many southern senators and the

act made it through Congress.

On 2 July 1964 Johnson sat at his desk in the White House, ringed by civil rights leaders and news cameras, and signed the Civil Rights Act into being. This sweeping piece of federal legislation was seismic in its importance. Brown-Nagin says: "What the Civil Rights Act did was to sweep away, in terms of its text, discrimination on the basis of race, sex, colour and religion in a wide

"Kennedy had been beholden to the segment of Congress who were fiercely opposed to civil rights legislation"



Word of honour A woman takes the voter registration oath in Canton, Ohio, August 1965. That year's Voting Rights Act aimed to outlaw discriminatory practices such as literacy tests

variety of areas – in public spaces, in schools, in employment. It was truly the crowning legislative achievement of the civil rights movement."

However, this landmark act still had its limitations. As the grassroots organisers in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee demonstrated powerfully, it did not have adequate protection for voting rights. This was an omission that stung keenly, as white Americans had long used a variety of tactics, from literacy tests to taxes, to prevent black Americans from being able to exercise the right to vote.

The following year, the 1965 Voting Rights Act was passed to right this wrong. It banned discriminatory practices like literacy tests and empowered federal examiners so that they could make sure the law was properly followed in resistant southern states. Brown-Nagin argues that this piece of legislation "did the unfinished business" of the Civil Rights Act.

An icon's assassination shocks the nation

MALCOLM X was shot dead by his former allies, but his legacy lived on through the burgeoning Black Power movement

Until the late sixties, the US civil rights struggle had largely been characterised by the integrationist philosophy of leaders like Martin Luther King, whose vision for the country's future saw black and white Americans coming together as one united nation. But as the years ground on, the end to racism still didn't seem to be in sight. Disillusioned and desiring change, many renewed their focus on another strain of black freedom politics: black nationalism

Ashley Farmer, an associate professor at the University of Texas, told me: "The central themes of black nationalism are self-determination – meaning the right to decide for oneself or one's community how one should live; race pride – the idea that blackness is inherently beautiful; and self-defence – both against harmful stereotypes, and against unwelcome

intrusions into one's community."

One of the most influential black nationalists of the era was Malcolm X. He came to prominence as spokesman for the Nation of Islam (NOI). Clarence Lang, Susan Welch dean of the College of the Liberal Arts and professor of African American Studies, explains that this group believed that "people of African descent in the US were the original people whom Allah had chosen. They were trapped in a society that was controlled by 'white devils'". The NOI sought to create their own autonomous institutions and "build a parallel society to advance their interests and preserve themselves as Muslims – or one version of being a Muslim, as their approach to Islam was certainly not orthodox".

However, in time Malcolm began to chafe against the NOI, as his own worldview shifted away from racist doctrine. He left

the Nation in 1964 and later founded his own secular group, called the Organisation of Afro-American Unity. According to Lang: "Through this, he sought to intervene more actively in the US civil rights struggle and further internationalise it, by drawing a connection between US racial oppression and colonialism abroad."

Plunged into chaos

But Malcolm's efforts came to an abrupt halt on 21 February 1965. He arrived at the Audubon Ballroom in Manhattan to deliver a speech to 400 people who wanted to hear more about his fledgling organisation. His pregnant wife, Betty, and their four daughters were in the crowd that night.

Shortly after he stepped onto the podium, however, the room was plunged into chaos.

As he greeted the audience, a smoke bomb was thrown in the crowd, and people started to scream. In the confusion, a man advanced on the stage, wielding a sawn-off shotgun, and shot Malcolm square in the chest. Two other men then rushed forward, brandishing firearms of their own, and began to rain bullets down on Malcolm's lower body, before all three turned and fled. Malcolm was pronounced dead 15 minutes later.

Malcolm's killers were all members of the Nation of Islam. But although this group was responsible for pulling the trigger, they weren't the only ones who gained something from the leader's death. Lang says: "While Malcolm's murder served political interests for the Nation of Islam and its leadership, it also stretched beyond the group, to serve US government entities – including the executive branch of the American government." The FBI director, J Edgar Hoover, had been deeply suspicious of Malcolm, and had placed him under heavy surveillance.

Although the authorities might have hoped that calls for a separate black nation would have died with Malcolm, they continued to grow – and many, such as the founders of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, were deeply inspired by Malcolm's ideology. Farmer says that "there is probably no one person who influenced the rise of the Black Power movement more than Malcolm X".

While Black Power waned in popularity in later years, it remains intertwined with the history of the US civil rights movement, whose sprawling and complex legacy continues to shape America today. **H**

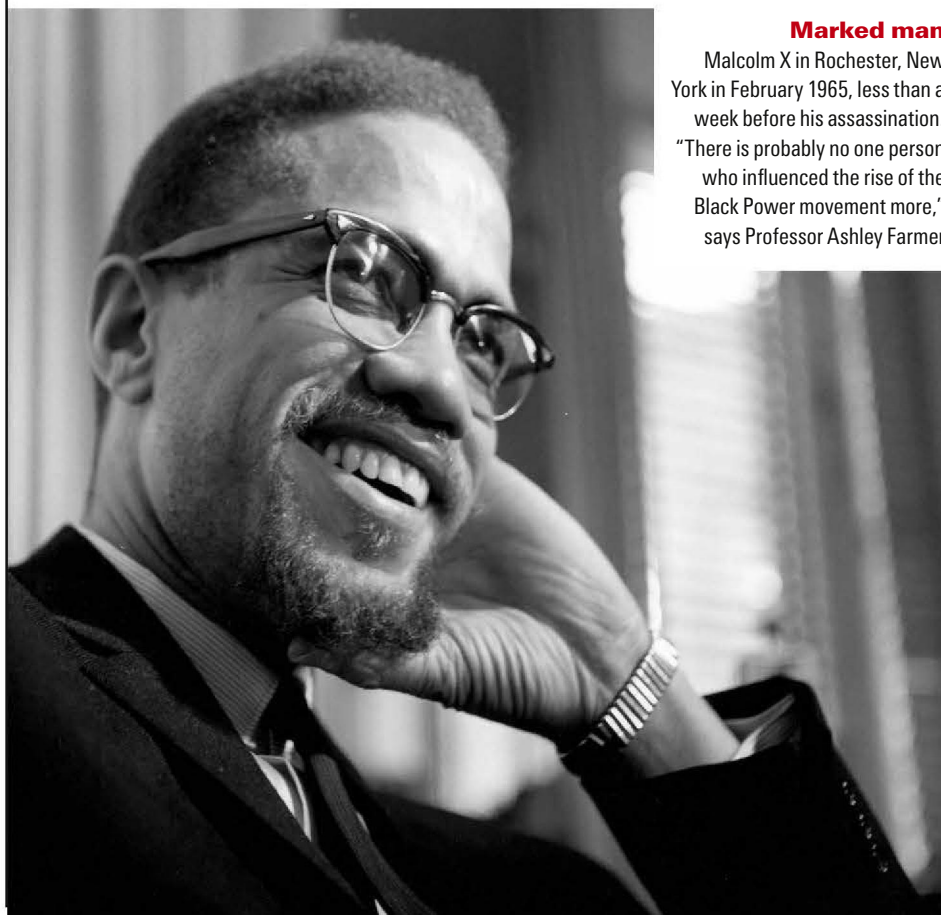
Rhiannon Davies is section editor of *BBC History Magazine* and the host of our new podcast series on the civil rights movement



An episode of the BBC's **Face to Face** includes an interview with Martin Luther

King: bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/p00lgzyl/face-to-face-martin-luther-king

BBC
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Marked man

Malcolm X in Rochester, New York in February 1965, less than a week before his assassination.

"There is probably no one person who influenced the rise of the Black Power movement more," says Professor Ashley Farmer

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BBC HiSTORY MAGAZINE

Sidi Mubarak Bombay

Unsung African adventurer

Stolen from his village as a boy, enslaved and trafficked to a distant land, the intrepid and big-hearted Sidi Mubarak Bombay returned to travel across his home continent on pioneering expeditions. **CANDICE MILLARD** introduces a little-known but exceptional explorer

Sidi Mubarak Bombay never forgot the moment he lost everything. It was the early 19th century, and he was just a child living in a remote village in the Yao territory of east Africa, which today lies on the border between Tanzania and Mozambique. He never knew his mother, who died soon after he was born, but he had a father, a family, friends, a home. All were taken from him when, as he later recalled with moving candour, a large group of men “equipped with sword and gun, came suddenly”.

These were not strangers. They had been there before, offering goods that they knew the villagers could ill afford. The Yao, Bantu-speaking peoples of east and central Africa, were far from naive: they were sophisticated agriculturalists, highly skilled ironsmiths and experienced traders. They had long worked with the Arabs, bringing ivory and enslaved people from the interior to the coast to sell to them. Bombay’s village, however, was inland and isolated, allowing its inhabitants little interaction with the outside world, and leaving them vulnerable to the traps that slave traders patiently laid.

Upon their return to Bombay’s village, the men “demanded of the inhabitants instant liquidation of their debts... or stand the consequence of refusal”. No wealthier now than they had been when they incurred the debts, and with no guns to defend themselves, the villagers had only one hope: to run. “The whole village,”

Bombay remembered, “took to precipitate flight.”

Bombay never learned what happened to his father, nor did he ever again call this village home. Along with everyone else who had not escaped – or died trying – he was bound with rope and chains, and dragged hundreds of miles to the coast. Forced onto a boat, he was taken first to the island of Kilwa and then north to Zanzibar, where he was sold for cloth and put on a ship bound for India. Now thousands of miles from home, he was stripped not only of his freedom and his family but

also of his name. For the rest of his life he would be known by his Indian moniker: Sidi Mubarak Bombay.

Bombay’s enslavement lasted some 20 years, until his enslaver died. Finally gaining his freedom, he returned to east Africa. The life he had once known was gone, but he was now older, stronger. He had a better understanding of the world’s brutality, but also of his own resilience.

Scramble for Africa

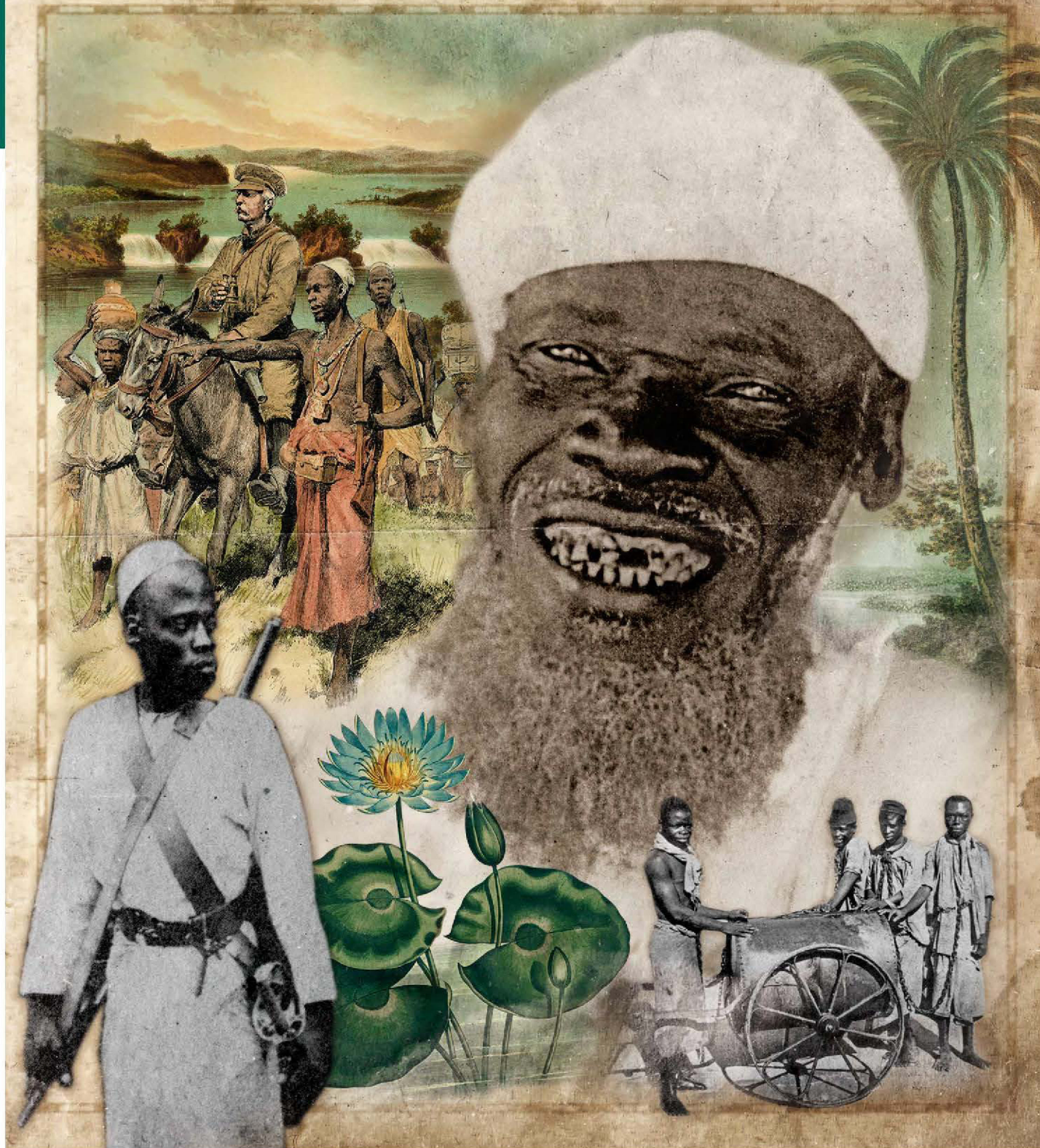
By the mid-19th century, British and other European interest in Africa had reached fever pitch, sparking a frenzied race to explore and map the continent and, ultimately, to colonise it. Among the most ambitious of these efforts was the East African Expedition, launched by the Royal Geographical Society in 1856 and led by the famed British explorer Richard Francis Burton, with John Hanning Speke as second-in-command. The two men were sent to east Africa with one mission taking priority above all others: to find the source of the Nile.

The longest and most storied river in the world, the Nile brings life to the Egyptian desert, nurturing one of the oldest and richest civilisations in history. Finding the river’s source had been the Holy Grail of exploration for millennia. The Nile comprises two primary branches, the White and the Blue. The source of the shorter, darker Blue Nile had been found in 1618 but, more than 200 years later, the source of the White Nile remained a mystery to the outside world.

Soon after Burton and Speke landed in Zanzibar in December 1856, they made a trip to explore the mainland coast, where they met the man now called Bombay, who was working for that state’s first sultan at a small military station. Hoping to add as many men as he could to his expedition, Burton hired several of the sultan’s soldiers. The only one who really impressed him was Bombay who, Burton wrote, quickly became “the gem of the party”. Though small and thin, Bombay was smart and strong. More important, his “good conduct and honesty of purpose”, Speke later marvelled, were “without parallel”.

What astonished Burton and Speke most about Bombay was that he had emerged from the staggering tragedy of his early life not with bitterness but with seemingly endless stores of kindness and good will. “He would do no wrong to benefit himself,” Speke wrote. “To please anybody else there is nothing he would stick

// Bombay emerged from the tragedy of his early life not with bitterness but with endless stores of kindness **//**



Our collage contains three images of Sidi Mubarak Bombay (bottom left, top right, and top left, with Henry Morton Stanley), as well as a photograph of enslaved people in Zanzibar (bottom right) – a fate that also befell Bombay

COLLAGE BY ROSEMARY SMITH

at.” Even Burton, who liked to complain that Bombay was forgetful and clumsy, had to admit that no one was more thoughtful or eager to help. In particular, he would never forget Bombay’s kindness toward him during an especially gruelling march, when both Burton and Speke became too ill to walk unaided. The expedition could spare only one donkey, which was given to Speke, leaving Burton to hobble behind as best he could. Forced to lie down to rest every half hour, he looked up at one point to see Bombay, who had been leading Speke’s donkey, hurrying back along the path toward him. “I saw with pleasure the

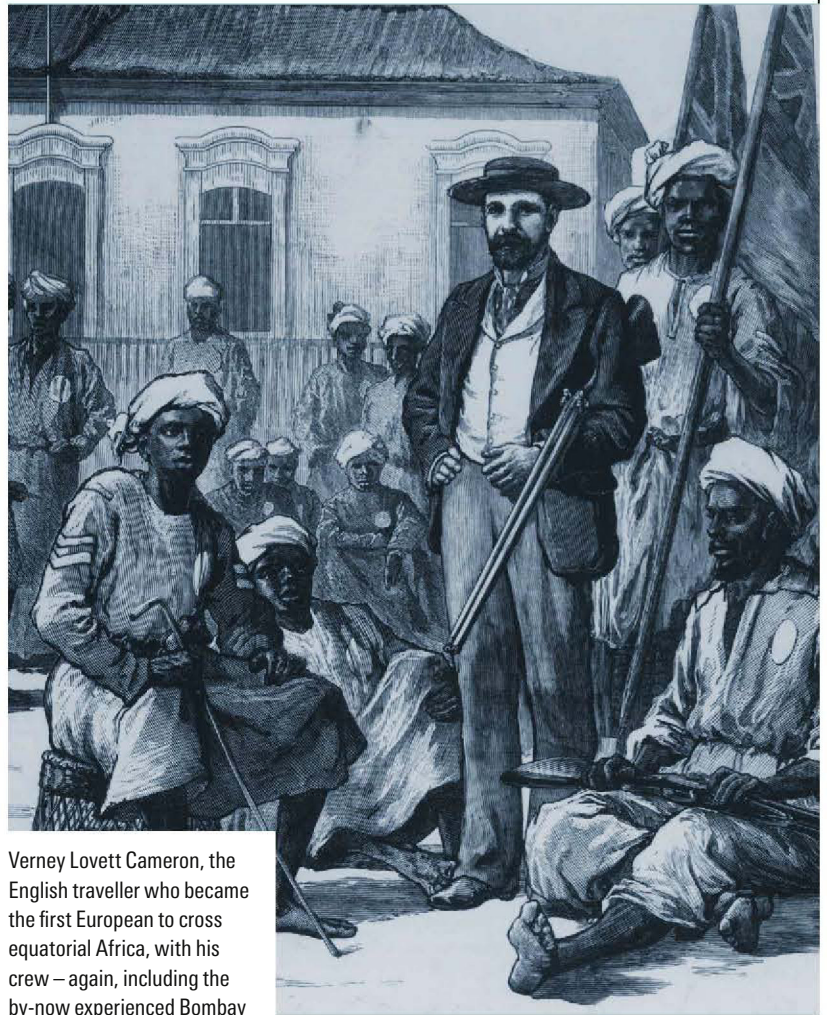
kindly face of Seedy Bombay,” he wrote, “who was returning to me in hot haste, leading an ass, and carrying a few scones and hard-boiled eggs.”

The forgotten factotum

Over the following three decades, Bombay worked as caravan leader and translator, guard and guide, porter and nurse on a series of further expeditions. With Burton and Speke he traversed more than 1,000 miles of the African interior, helping them become the first Europeans to see Lake Tanganyika, the longest and



An engraving shows Henry Morton Stanley's famous meeting with David Livingstone on the banks of the Tanganyika in 1871. Bombay played a key role in helping Stanley find the Scottish explorer



Verney Lovett Cameron, the English traveller who became the first European to cross equatorial Africa, with his crew – again, including the by-now experienced Bombay

// In 1875, Bombay travelled across the continent, becoming the first to cross equatorial Africa from sea to sea //

second-deepest freshwater lake in the world. Several months later, on their way back to the coast, Speke and Bombay temporarily left the central expedition and took a smaller group to another lake, known to some locals as Nyanza – the largest freshwater body in Africa, and the second-largest in the world. Although he could not prove it – and Burton, who had been too ill to make this additional journey, was sceptical – Speke was convinced that the Nyanza was the source of the White Nile.

After the end of the East African Expedition, the search to establish the source continued without Burton – but not without Bombay. When Speke, now leading his own expedition, returned to east Africa in 1860, the first man he wanted with him was Bombay. Together they travelled back to the Nyanza, which Speke had named Victoria after his own queen, but were unable to circumnavigate it.

Ten years later, Bombay helped lead the Welsh-American journalist Henry Morton

Stanley to the banks of the Tanganyika, where he found the Scottish explorer-missionary David Livingstone, who had been missing for four years. Stanley later circumnavigated the Nyanza, confirming it as the principal source of the White Nile. Bombay's last European-backed expedition was with Verney Lovett Cameron, when they became the first to cross equatorial Africa, from east to west, sea to sea. Despite the important role he had played in so many of their expeditions, the Royal Geographical Society never brought Bombay to Britain. After retiring from exploring, he worked for the Church Missionary Society, dying in Africa at the age of 65.

Every explorer with whom Bombay travelled has been commemorated in stone or word, or both. Although the Royal Geographical Society awarded Bombay a silver medal and a small lifetime pension, no memorials have been built in his honour and no biographies tell his remarkable life story. The world, however, has slowly begun to change. A fuller tale is emerging – one that may finally allow Bombay, along with men and women like him, to take his rightful place in the annals of exploration. **H**

Candice Millard is a writer and journalist. Her new book, *River of the Gods: Genius, Courage, and Betrayal in the Search for the Source of the Nile* (Swift Press), is out now



Hideous fate Women are persecuted during a witch trial in the Bavarian town of Schongau, c1590. Our relationship with witch hunts has been on a complex journey over the past 500 years

Why we're still living in the age of the witch hunt

The gruesome mass executions of the early modern era may have abated, but that doesn't mean the persecution of so-called witches has come to an end

BY **MARION GIBSON**

The ‘age of the witch hunts’. It’s a phrase that historians like me love to use – and many readers will, no doubt, have a good idea what it means. From the mid-15th to the mid-18th centuries, tens of

thousands of witches were put on trial across Europe and the Americas. Witches were thought to cast murderous spells on their neighbours, plot magical treason and hold heretical sabbaths where they worshipped the devil and sacrificed babies. They stood accused of nurturing demonic familiars, firing off love spells, damaging crops and participating in orgies. And they paid a terrible price. Between 1450 and 1750, an estimated 40,000–60,000 people were put to death for their imaginary crimes.

But what happened next? What trajectory did witch hunts follow beyond the mid-18th century? The ‘age of the witch hunts’ may often be used as a shorthand for a grisly 300-year period when the persecution of witchcraft was at its height, but it doesn’t occupy a neatly defined date range with concrete start and end points.

Witch hunts didn’t disappear the moment the calendar reached 1750.

In fact, since that time, hundreds of thousands of people have been accused of witchcraft. And they continue to be accused to this very day. In some countries witchcraft is still a crime and people are executed for it after formal trials. In others, suspected witches are tried informally and then killed or exiled from their homes.

That witch trials very much survived ‘the age of the witch hunts’ is attested to by historical sources.

For example, in 1808 Ann Izzard was beaten and scratched when her Cambridgeshire cottage was attacked: fellow-villagers thought drawing her blood would lift a spell she had cast on them. Then, in 1849, a Bengali woman known as Eullal was tortured and killed by a mob who believed she had put the “evil eye” on a neighbour. Chillu paste was rubbed into her eyes to destroy her magic.

Three decades later in Bulawayo, in present-day Zimbabwe, the AmaNdebele king Lobengula had his sister Mncengence and six others hanged for witchcraft. Mncengence was thought to have bewitched Lobengula’s wife, Xwalile, causing infertility. In 1928, a faith-healer, Nelson Rehmyer, was killed by his Pennsylvania neighbours who thought he had bewitched a farm, causing ill-health and bad luck. And, as recently as 2021, 324 accusations of witchcraft were made in one province in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Eight of those accused are reported to have been murdered.

So people continue to be accused of witchcraft – and pay awful penalties for their ‘crimes’ – across the world. But that doesn’t mean we look upon the phenomenon through the same eyes as our predecessors in the 18th century. In fact, over the past three centuries, our relationship with the concept of witch hunts has changed in all kinds of ways – and those changes have even left their mark on Donald Trump’s Twitter account.

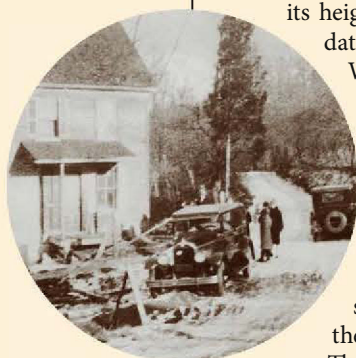
During his presidency, Trump tweeted the phrase “WITCH HUNT!” no fewer than 379 times. Not everyone may have agreed with his sentiments but they knew exactly what he meant. ‘Witch’ has become a synonym for ‘scapegoat’ or ‘victim’, and Trump was claiming that he was a victim of groundless persecution.

These tweets shine a light on a term that’s been on quite a journey. In the 21st century, ‘witch hunt’ can mean sexual discrimination, persecution based on political views or religious beliefs, or attacks based on race, nationality, disability or another characteristic. It was in the late 17th century that witches began to be redefined in this way and, over the following centuries, several high-profile European and American test cases fought out arguments over what a ‘witch’ might be in modern times. If the word no longer designated a magical criminal, then what did ‘witch’ mean?

When seeking to answer this question, a good place to start is 18th-century France. For it was here, in 1731, that Marie-Catherine Cadiere, an oil merchant’s daughter from Toulon, and her Jesuit confessor Jean-Baptiste Girard were both charged with witchcraft.

Cadiere was just 21, a sickly, vulnerable and hyper-religious girl who could read but not write, and who wanted more from her narrow life. In the 1720s she had joined a prayer group led by Girard, a priest in his mid-40s. Cadiere loved his uplifting stories of pious women, especially ones who had experienced holy visions raising them from poverty-stricken lives to near-sainthood. Soon she began to see visions herself. People gathered to watch her writhe and weep, cutting herself in imitation of Christ’s wounds.

But in 1730 Cadiere left Girard’s group and accused him of raping and impregnating her, then dosing her with an abortifacient drug. Girard denied her allegations: instead his supporters accused Cadiere of bewitching her trusting confessor into believing her visions. Struggling to resolve these conflicting claims, the French authorities put



The home of Nelson Rehmyer, after he was killed by neighbours who believed he had bewitched a farm

“Eight so-called witches were murdered in one province in the Democratic Republic of Congo as recently as 2021



Three women are burned following the Derenburg witch trial of 1555 in what is now Germany. Between 40,000 and 60,000 people were put to death for their imaginary crimes during the 'age of the witch hunts'

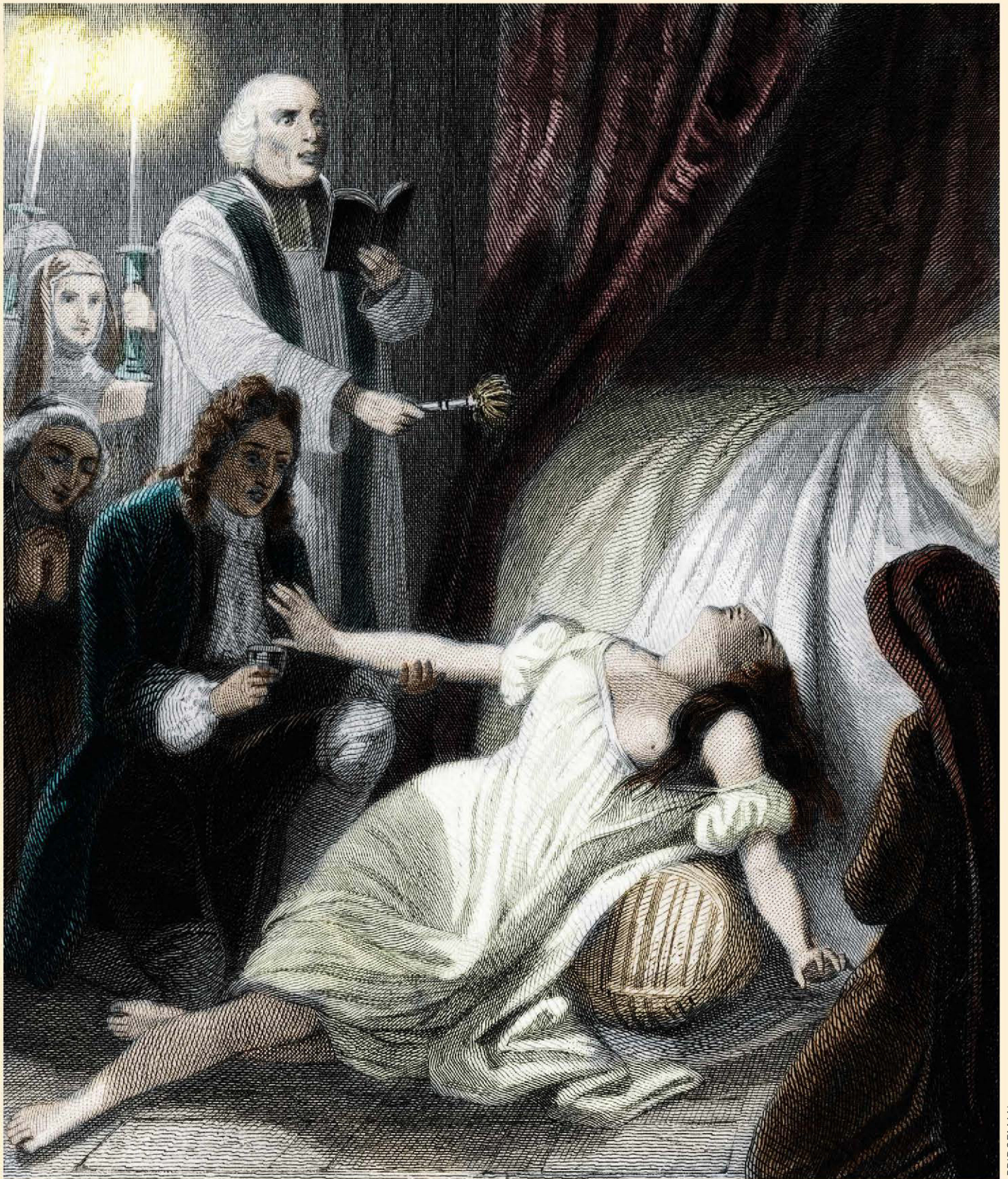


ALAMY/TOPFOTO

A witch gown dating to the late 17th century. Though items such as this may appear to be relics of a distant past, people continue to be persecuted for witchcraft, and 'witch hunt' is very much a fixture in the modern lexicon



A 19th-century engraving shows Jean-Baptiste Girard embracing Marie-Catherine Cadiere. By the time the pair went to court, 'witches' in France were no longer being tried as magical criminals



A 19th-century engraving shows the exorcism of Marie-Catherine Cadiere. Influenced by both medieval and Enlightenment attitudes to witchcraft, Cadiere and Jean-Baptiste Girard's trial was roundly denounced as a shambles



both Cadiere and Girard on trial as witches.

In 1682, France had adopted a royal edict on witchcraft, and both Cadiere and Girard were tried under that. The edict was a snapshot of how theories about witchcraft were changing in the 'Age of Reason'. It stated that witches who harmed others should be put to death – but only if they were blasphemous, had committed sacrilege or used poison. The age-old crime of cursing neighbours was no longer enough to merit execution.

The edict also appeared to suggest magic didn't really exist – another indication of the 'Age of Reason' – and it stated that poison, rather than spells, was needed to commit murder. As such, it avoided mentioning classic witch activities such as attending sabbaths and making a pact with the devil, and replaced them with other charges: fake astrology, divination and fortune-telling. Once these practices were feared as potent magic; now they were reclassified as con-tricks. All in all, it was a slippery redefinition that opened the way for a new kind of witch-hunting: witch trials without magic.

The double indictment of Marie-Catherine Cadiere and Jean-Baptiste Girard contained elements of both old-style and new-style witch trials. Both were charged with witchcraft in the older sense of the word: a type of blasphemy and sacrilege. But both were accused of other crimes, too: Cadiere with new-style witchcraft fakery in the form of mystical visions; Girard with abortion, heresy and rape. It was all extremely confusing. Not surprisingly, proceedings dragged on for months as lawyers wrangled over what 'witchcraft' meant. In October 1731 both Cadiere and Girard were acquitted. Their trial was mocked as a poorly defined, traumatic shambles.

British legislators watched the Cadiere-Girard trial with horror. In 1735 they decided to pass their own Witchcraft Act, which repealed earlier anti-witch laws and stated simply that: "No prosecution, suit, or proceeding, shall be commenced or carried on against any person or persons for witchcraft, sorcery, enchantment, or conjuration... in any court whatsoever." It added that no one should "pretend to exercise or use any kind of witchcraft, sorcery, enchantment, or conjuration, or undertake to tell fortunes, or pretend, from his or her skill or knowledge in any occult or crafty science, to discover where or in what manner any goods or chattels, supposed to have been stolen or lost, may be found". A year's imprisonment was the penalty for these activities.

The old type of witchcraft crime had been replaced by a newly defined offence that stated magic was impossible. Many people across the globe have continued to equate witchcraft with magic (as the fate of Nelson Rehmeyer proves), but that was no longer the case in British law: anyone prosecuted under the act would be tried not as a magical criminal but for practising fake mysticism.

Interestingly, trials under Witchcraft Act charges continued intermittently in Britain for more than 200 years.

The most famous case was that of Helen or Nellie Duncan, who was tried in London in 1944. This case shows how far the relationship between witchcraft and lawmakers had evolved over the past two centuries but also how witch-persecutions still mirrored those of the 'age of the witch hunts'.

Duncan was a 46-year-old Scot who, coming from a background as a badly paid, chronically ill, teenage mother to an illegitimate daughter, now ran a thriving business as a spiritualist medium. As a child she'd described conversations with God and now she claimed to channel the spirits of the dead, so they could communicate with friends and relatives from the afterlife. During trances in a darkened room, Duncan would speak in the voices of a little girl or an old man, giving messages to grieving families. Sometimes, spirits seemed to materialise as a white mass called 'ectoplasm', which Duncan said she could extrude from her body. Most people, however, thought Duncan's spirit voices were ventriloquism and her ectoplasm was white cloth. Because of this scepticism, she was accused of faking materialisations during seances – specifically, ones held at the Master Temple Psychic Centre in Portsmouth in January 1944 – and she was tried at the Old Bailey under the 1735 Witchcraft Act.

Portsmouth's Master Temple was in a house containing a chemist's shop run by Bessie and Ernest Homer. The Homers assisted Duncan in her seances at this house-church and, along with her agent Frances Brown, they were charged with conspiring to defraud seance customers. In the terms used by the Witchcraft Act, Duncan, Brown and the Homers had pretended to exercise a kind of witchcraft, sorcery, enchantment, or conjuration – the calling-up of spirits.

As well as Duncan's mediumship, Bessie Homer, who ran the church, claimed to be able to receive spirit communications through physical objects owned by the deceased. Both women said they did not conjure spirits, but instead passively received ghostly messages. However, attendance at their Master Temple was expensive and Portsmouth police believed Duncan and her co-defendants were defrauding grief-stricken customers. To police, prosecutors and even her defence team, Duncan was "a nobody", not "an educated woman or a clever woman". As someone unable to "speak in cultured English", what would she know about summoning dead people? It must all be fakery. Her trial jury agreed and she served a six-month prison term. Brown was also

A 1931 portrait of the medium Helen Duncan, who was prosecuted under the Witchcraft Act, two centuries after it was introduced



“Anyone tried under the new Witchcraft Act would be prosecuted not as a magical criminal but for practising fake mysticism



Congolese children accused of witchcraft attend mass, February 2023. Women and marginal groups are still disproportionately targeted by witch hunts, says Marion Gibson

jailed. The Homers were convicted but not imprisoned.

The accusation of fakery is the driving force behind many post-1750 witch trials. However, Duncan shared a number of characteristics with thousands of those put on trial at the height of the witchcraft scares between 1550 and 1750, including Marie-Catherine Cadiere: limited educational opportunities, a florid religious imagination allowing her to express herself, delicate health, a complex sexual history and a desire to better the poor, obscure life that confined her to obedient work.

The defendants' unorthodox religious faith may also have contributed to their prosecution, just as it would have done centuries earlier. Spiritualists contended that God contacted people through manifestations of the dead – a belief that, in the medieval or early modern period, would have resulted in them being labelled heretics as well as witches. And, of course, it can't be overlooked that Duncan, Bessie Homer, Frances Brown and Cadiere were women. Around 80 per cent of suspects studied by historians across all jurisdictions during the age of the witch hunts were female.

Meanwhile, Ernest Homer was just the sort of man who might have been accused in the Middle Ages: a religious non-conformist overshadowed by his controversial, entrepreneurial wife. In fact men, though typically in the minority, have continued to be accused of witchcraft into the modern age. Many worked as 'cunning men' or faith-healers, and were often attacked as suspected witches. In 1935 a Loire Valley farmer shot his neighbour, a man whom he believed to be a witch – and was acquitted of murder because the court believed the killing was justified.

In 1909 a Bristol curate, Montie Summers, was dismissed from his post because he was suspected of satan-

ism. Like many female 'witches', he was also sexually 'sinful', having been accused of pederasty (having sex with a boy). Summers was openly gay, wanted homosexuality legalised and in 1907 had published a book of homoerotic poems. It's not clear whether Summers did or did not have sex with a teenage boy, but he wasn't accused of rape. In other respects the charges against him recall those of previous centuries: a sexual offence combined with heresy.

“ In 1940s Lesotho, two district governors – both opponents of colonial rule – were hanged for witchcraft

In colonial contexts, too, European governors continued to pursue 'witches'. In Lesotho in 1949 two leaders of the Basotho people, Bereng Leretholi and Gabashane Masupha, were executed for "witchcraft murder". They were convicted of ordering the killing of an epileptic man, 'Meleke Ntai, so they could use his severed lips in a charm designed to gain political power.

Bereng and Gabashane's trial was one of several in 1940s Lesotho where the cause of a person's death was disputed. Had the victims been killed to gather magical ingredients, or had they died accidentally? In some instances, magically motivated murder looked proven, but in Bereng and Gabashane's case medical examiners concluded their 'victim' had probably died by misadventure and his lips had been eaten by crabs in the pool where his body was found. Nevertheless, the two leaders – powerful district governors and opponents of colonial rule – were hanged. The colonial authorities did not believe in magic but they knew local people did – and so it was possible for them to claim the two men were 'witches' who deserved execution for their supposed crimes.

Witchcraft trials continue in the former British empire to this day. As late as 2018, people of Indian descent and neo-pagan women were regularly being convicted of magical fraud under a version of the British Witchcraft Act remaining on the statute books in Canada. The medium Vishwantee Persaud, astrologer Murali Muthyalu, the psychics and clairvoyants Tiffany Butch, Madeena and Samantha Stevenson were all convicted of fraud related to versions of 'pretended witchcraft', including claiming to contact the dead, providing information by occult means and lifting curses.

Definitions of witch hunting and witch trials have changed over time, but across history those charged with witchcraft-related offences tend to share similar traits. They are often female, mostly marginal, members of groups routinely subjected to harassment and injustice. In this way, they are similar to accused witches from the age of the witch hunts – an age that we're still living in today. **H**

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Marion Gibson is professor of renaissance and magical literatures at the University of Exeter. Her latest book, *Witchcraft: A History in Thirteen Trials*, was published by Simon & Schuster in June

 In **Lucy Worsley Investigates**, the historian explored the terrifying history of witch hunts in Britain. You can watch it now on BBC iPlayer **BBC iPLAYER**

BOOKS

NORTH AMERICA

“The book reframes the past with Native peoples as equal protagonists”

Caroline Dodds Pennock lauds a new history of North America's Indigenous inhabitants > page 72



ARCHAEOLOGY

// This is a breathless account of adventures from the Enlightenment tradition of treasure hunting //

Brenna Hassett is impressed by a guide to some of the most thrilling archaeological finds of the past 300 years > page 74

THE BRITISH EMPIRE

“His purpose is to quell what he calls the ‘dreary monotony of colonial storytelling’”

Jon Wilson praises a study of global people's interactions with British colonists > page 70

THE ROYAL NAVY

“Persistent tensions over pay, conditions and recruitment culminated in the mutinies of 1797”

Andrew Lambert on an account of a fraught period in the Royal Navy's history > page 73

INTERVIEW

Joya Chatterji discusses the violence and upheaval of south Asia's 20th century > page 66



"The idea that political projects such as nation-making can ever be totally successful is a misconception"

JOYA CHATTERJI talks to Matt Elton about her book charting the tumultuous course of south Asia's 20th-century, including the violence that followed the creation of three new countries after the withdrawal of the British empire

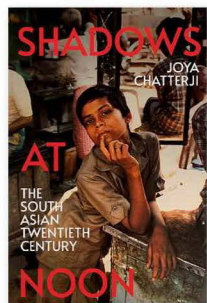
Matt Elton: Your new book covers what you describe as "the South Asian 20th century". What do you mean by that term?

Joya Chatterji: I focus on the area ruled by the former British Raj, formally or informally. I think of there being a kind of united south Asia in which glimmers of the British empire (and the social structures that predated it) could still be made out throughout the latter half of the 20th century – long after the British themselves had left.

I'm also keen to push back against the idea that the history of India, Pakistan or Bangladesh can be understood independently of that of the others. They're too intertwined. It just wasn't the case that they were all somehow born entirely anew after partition in 1947 or 1971. In trying to understand the processes by which they were fashioned, and the effort that was put into trying to create new nations and new citizens so apparently different from each other, we can also see much about the parallels and the commonalities.

One of the landmark political moments in this history is the 1947 Partition of India. Do you think that the events and repercussions of that episode are misunderstood outside south Asia?

The level of ignorance is quite astonishing – even in Britain, where you might expect a greater awareness because of its close involvement in the event, not least by British prime minister Clement Attlee and [last Viceroy of India] Lord Louis Mountbatten. Of course, that's partly because many partition migrants haven't told their stories, so we're missing out on a fully layered version of what happened – although this has begun to change.



Shadows at Noon: The South Asian Twentieth Century

By Joya Chatterji
(Bodley Head,
864 pages, £30)

You write that Pakistan was formed almost entirely by refugees. Could you elaborate on that point?

Muhammad Ali Jinnah [Pakistan's founder and first head of state] was a refugee, as was Liaquat Ali Khan, his right-hand man and Pakistan's first prime minister. In fact, the core leadership of the Muslim League [the Indian political party campaigning for Muslim interests in the first half of the 20th century] all came from the United Provinces – roughly the region encompassed by the modern Indian states of Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand.

So these men, who had such an influence on the creation of Muslim Pakistan, came

from this north Indian cultural and literary world. They had a certain idea of how to write, how to comport themselves, and how to carry themselves. They knew Shakespeare and Yeats, and [Indian poets] Mirza Ghalib and Altaf Hussain Hali, and were part of a group dense with culture and education. So they quite naturally and seamlessly moved into positions of leadership, and regarded the people of the regions that become Pakistan as a bit earthy, a bit 'less' than they were – they were kind of snooty about them. So there was always a tension between the Urdu-speaking elite, who began to control the new Pakistan's bureaucracy and many private businesses, and provincial political leaders who asked: "Who the hell are you? We've been here long before you were." So Pakistan has a very tense origin story.

In India, though, the refugee influx did not have quite the same effect because, even though refugee numbers were pretty much the same across the Punjab, what remained of India after partition was so much larger and could therefore more easily absorb all those refugees into the state. Having said that, signs of those divisions and tensions are still evident in India today. In Delhi I live next to an urban village, created when people were squeezed out of areas that were formerly agrarian communities; new refugee settlements had cropped up where they had once farmed. Delhi is a prime refugee city: its language has become Punjabi, even though the school syllabus is in Hindi. We Dilli-wallas [people of Delhi] all understand Punjabi, because that was the language of the refugees.

You write that, following partition, people in the new nations had sky-high expectations of their new freedoms. Was there a real sense that this was a time of new opportunity?

Absolutely. There were many disparate nationalist movements across south Asia during the early decades of the 20th century – violent, non-violent, religiously inclined, secular – but each one had a utopian element, and a belief that, after independence, everything was going to be just fine for everyone. But when the new states were born, there were absolutely catastrophic conditions. The partition aggravated an already serious problem of poverty because it divided the surplus-food-growing regions, which went to Pakistan, from the rest of India. This deprived Pakistani peasants (as they suddenly had become) of their markets, and Indian consumers of their main staples, wheat and rice.

The length and depth of the nationalist tradition meant that the resulting pressure on the political system was enormous. People had really felt that something new was going to be born, that some wonderful dawn was going to break – but of course nothing of the sort



PROFILE

Joya Chatterji is emeritus professor in the history of modern south Asia at the University of Cambridge. Her previous books include *Partition's Legacies* (State University of New York Press, 2021), *The Spoils of Partition: Bengal and India, 1947–1967* (Cambridge University Press, 2007) and *Bengal Divided* (CUP, 2002).

PHOTOGRAPHY BY
ABHISHEK BALI

ever transpired. All that happened was that one flag came down and another went up. The resulting disillusionment with the state has become a big factor in the emergence of what we could term the politicised public and cynicism towards the state.

One of your key arguments is that, despite multi-generational efforts to make inhabitants of these new states feel different from their neighbours, they are more alike than is sometimes allowed for. Can you expand on that?

The discourse surrounding the enmity between these states is strong, as is the idea that their fundamentals could not be more different – particularly during the years of Nehruvianism [the postcolonial vision of Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first prime minister 1947–64]. There was a common view among Indians at that time that Indians were secular, and embraced unity and diversity, whereas Pakistan was a religious state. In many ways, that was nonsense: early Pakistan was rather liberal and, before the 1971 partition that created Bangladesh, had a much larger minority non-Muslim population that it had undertaken to protect. But people in India were fed those stories so often and in so many ways that they largely didn't challenge them.

Of course, many people in each country came from 'the other side', and remembered people who still lived there. Until their dying day, a refugee might not understand why they suddenly needed a visa to travel to what they regarded as their home. Their personal identity no longer matched with where they were allowed to live. So this is in many ways a very complicated, tragic story.

We should talk about the events of 1971 and the creation of Bangladesh. To what extent was what happened that year inevitable because of the way Pakistan had been formed in 1947?

I don't think that anything in history is inevitable. I certainly don't think that what happened in 1947 was inevitable. The lines that Cyril Radcliffe [the British lawyer who headed the boundary committees tasked with determining the new borders] drew up to divide India and Pakistan, for instance, were peculiar in themselves. Nobody could have predicted the form that Bangladesh [whose border with India is still marked by Radcliffe's lines] took, nor its size, nor the fact that it would dominate the population of post-partition Pakistan.

But once the cookie started crumbling that way, there was always going to be a problem. The result of partition was that one region of Pakistan [East] spoke a different language – Bengali – from the other,

// Nobody could have predicted the form Bangladesh would take, nor its size, nor the fact that it would dominate the population of post-partition Pakistan //

and had a large Hindu minority, plus a weak, porous border with India. It also had a strange relationship with the Muslim League and its Urdu-speaking elite. There was an incursion of Urdu-speaking people into East Pakistan, taking a lot of the plum jobs in the administration, so there was a degree of tension from the start. Some steps were taken to alleviate it, but I think it was always too little, too late.

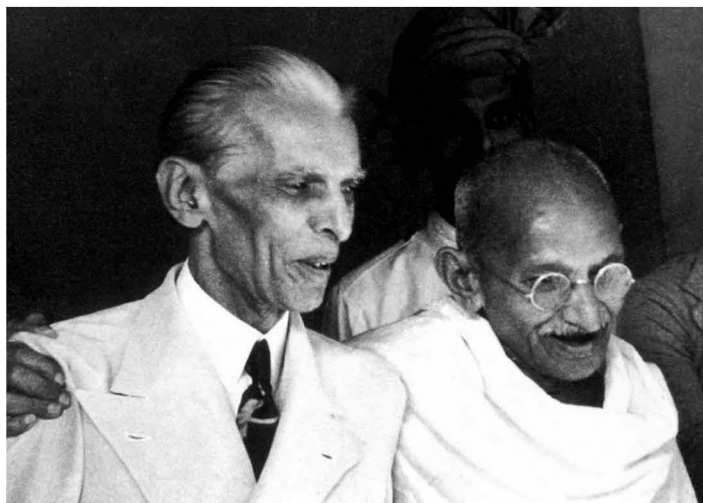
I'm Bengali, so perhaps I'm seeing it too much from the Bangladeshi point of view. But it seems to me that there was a kind of wilful blindness in the administration, unable to acknowledge this majority and the need to respect it, so a day of reckoning was always going to come – and when it did, it came in rivers of blood. I didn't write about the civil war in the book, because it was so ghastly that I just didn't have the words to describe it. Pretty much every household in Bangladesh suffered death, lost land to looting, and so on. It was a total war on society, by armed forces run amok – just unbelievably brutal.

After the creation of Bangladesh, a second genocide took place, this time against people who did not speak Bengali. They were described, inaccurately, as 'Urdu-speakers'. Every wave of nation-making has generated a rise of hatred for 'the enemy within'; in this respect, Bangladesh was no exception. But in other respects it has followed its own path, particularly on 'development'. After the disastrous famine of 1974–75, and the assassination in 1975 of the first prime minister, Mujibur Rahman, non-government organisations [NGOs] took the lead in developing Bangladeshi society from below. These groups, unlike the planners across the border, don't hector the poor about what is best for them, and they don't treat citizens as children. They work instead with village-dwellers who have their own ideas about what might help. So my suggestion is that the history of Bangladesh is not (or not only) that of its warring parties.

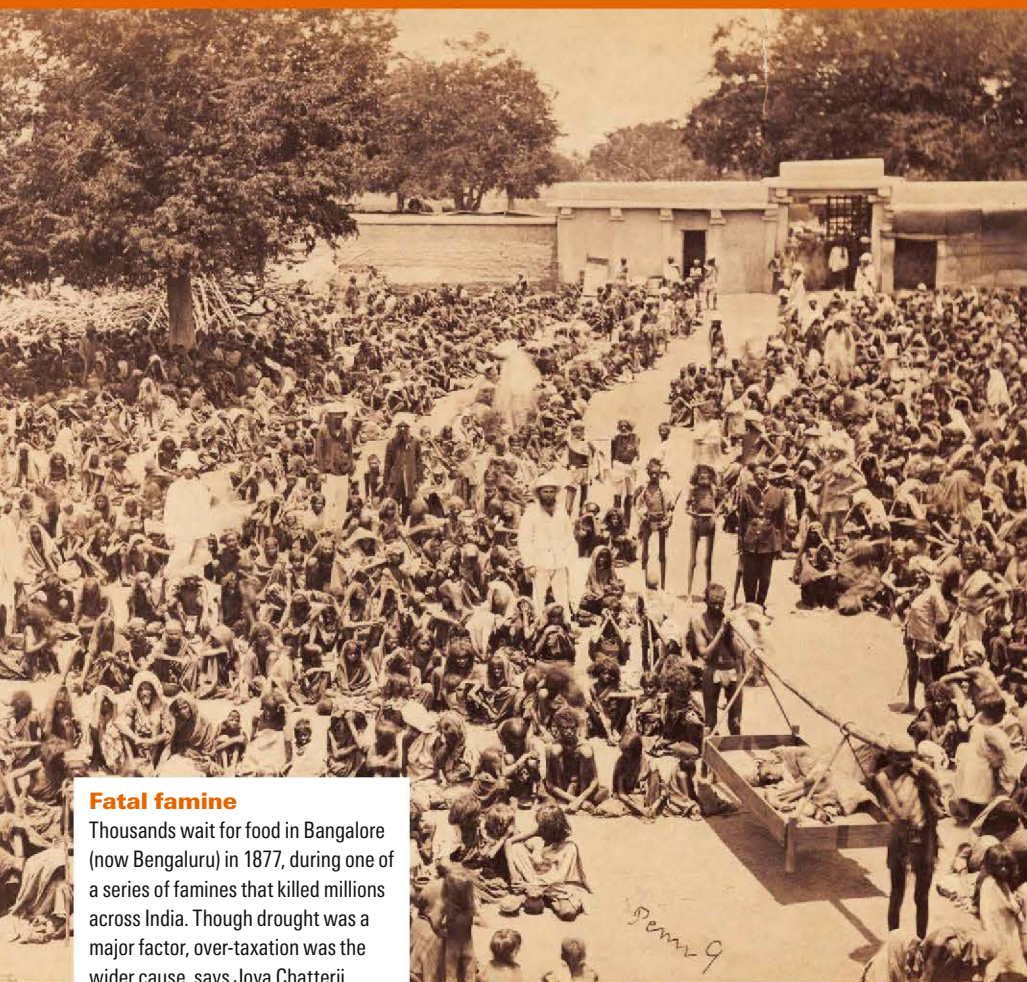
You argue that understanding why states fail to control people is crucial to understanding the history of the state in south Asia, in both the colonial and post-colonial period. Why?

The south Asian state has, historically speaking, controlled some people with spectacular cruelty some of the time, and completely failed to manage people at other times. Those choices are interesting. The state, generally speaking, has turned a blind eye to social crimes. It has not attempted to control what happens in the family or in the household, turning a blind eye to men killing or beating their female relatives, or to conditions of bondage or 'gentle slavery'. The reasons for this were essentially the same during and after colonialism: first, that the state has never had the capacity to tackle the problem, and second, because it is afraid of intruding into dimensions seen as being dictated by religious belief, or local systems of control. So whole aspects of social crime and oppression are seen as the domain of local patriarchy and powerful landowners, rather than central government.

What the state is interested in is any potential challenge to the state itself – then it comes down really hard. Insurgency, wherever it has taken place, has been crushed with as much force as possible.



Show of unity Muslim League leader Muhammad Ali Jinnah and Mahatma Gandhi meet in 1944 to discuss the independence and partition of India. Three years later, both ideas became reality



Fatal famine

Thousands wait for food in Bangalore (now Bengaluru) in 1877, during one of a series of famines that killed millions across India. Though drought was a major factor, over-taxation was the wider cause, says Joya Chatterji

In many ways, the authorities in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh have used the same baton as the British empire – though in many cases even more violently.

You also take a wider, thematic look at South Asia's past, and one of those themes is food. Why did you focus on that?

I chose it because hunger – actually, not just hunger, but starvation – was a potent cause of anti-British sentiment from the late 19th century onward. The famines of the late Victorian era represented the common ground between every nationalist project: everyone believed that sorting out the issue of food was an incredibly important priority. The immediate cause of those famines was usually drought caused by inadequate or untimely rainfall. But the wider cause was over-taxation of the peasantry, and a tax burden that left them no capacity to save in a good year and no means for surviving in years of drought. Famine was widespread but, in the era the book looks at, it fell particularly hard on southern, central and western India. A modest estimate is that some 15 million people died in consequence of a spate of famines between 1886 and 1900.

This precariousness of life, the loaded meanings of food, and the many inequities – within society and family – in the doling out of such food, made this a necessary topic in a book of this sort. But I also wanted to look at food in terms of its relationship with caste, which is a subject you have to explore if you want to write about south Asia.

It's striking that the main demands of south Asian people on both sides of the new borders were bread, clothing and a hut. Those were their basic expectations – and, in the main, they got none of them. So I wanted to trace the history behind why food became such a charged issue, and to illuminate the complicated system of ideas around it. In south Asia, food is not just food, but is tied into a tightly woven network of belonging, status pride and revulsion.

Finally, I wanted to push back against the widespread oversimplifi-

cation of the subject. There's no such thing as an 'Indian diet', for instance. The processes of modernity and globalisation make everyone all around the world eat in more diverse ways but, even historically speaking, people in India ate a diverse array of food according to what was available in their environment.

So there were lots of concepts surrounding food that I wanted to take apart, because if you don't understand the topic, you can't understand why south Asia today is still so peculiar about food, or why there is so much waste in a land of hungry people. Food is a key marker of caste, you see. 'Inter-dining' groups – made up of people from the same caste, or sub-caste, of which there are thousands – believe themselves to share status, and in most cases that they are better than those 'beneath' them. Upward mobility is registered through adopting new 'higher status' food practices, such as giving up meat.

What happens to those of 'low status'?

Well, the book shows that, too. It shows the contradictions in 'the system', but does not spare the reader from its most harrowing details.

Another aspect of culture you write about is wrestling. What led to your decision to include that sport rather than cricket?

I love cricket, but South Asia's love affair with that sport is well known, and people are probably less aware of the extent to which wrestling has been a South Asian phenomenon. I also wanted to focus on wrestling because – unlike cricket, which began very much as a sport of the elites – it was and remains the pastime of the common person. Even South Asians such as myself, who live in a bubble of books and paintings and films, may be unaware that this obsession even exists. So I hope that when, for instance, readers now watch an Indian movie featuring a big fight scene, they will have an awareness that what they're watching originates from this historical love of wrestling that's shared throughout Pakistan, India and Bangladesh.

Staying on the subject of unfamiliar aspects of this history, are there other events in this story that readers may not be aware of?

One of the types of event that has occurred repeatedly in south Asia is political assassination. My book features a section of images of people who were assassinated – and, let me tell you, it's very long. From Mahatma Gandhi in 1948 to Rajiv Gandhi in 1991, the sheer number of 'founding fathers' and strong leaders who have been killed is astounding, and the theme is even more striking if we consider it from a border-crossing perspective. It's caused a huge amount of instability.

What key myths or misconceptions about the south Asian 20th century would you like your book to correct?

The fundamental one is the idea that political projects such as nation-making can ever be totally successful. There's always going to be what I'd call some leakage at the edges, where people question the ideas and values behind these new nations. Even in Britain, with its diverse population from a whole range of backgrounds, we can see how complicated it is. The nation is a very novel idea, historically speaking – and imposing it on millions of people is hard work. ■



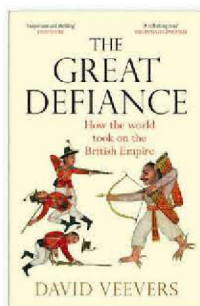
Meeting as equals

Native American Mohawk greet British trader and administrator Sir William Johnson during a land treaty meeting in 1760. Some indigenous peoples negotiated with British colonisers on their own terms

EMPIRE

Best defence

JON WILSON is swept up by a look at how diverse peoples worldwide reacted to British efforts to trade with, conquer, colonise and dominate their homelands



The Great Defiance: How the World Took on the British Empire

by David Veevers

Ebury Press, 512 pages, £25

Manteo and Wanchese were pioneering explorers. Leading figures in the Algonquian

community on Roanoke Island, on North America's Atlantic coast, the two men were persuaded to sail to London after the first English mission to the region arrived in 1584. They were tasked by their chief, Wingina,

with finding out as much as possible about the strangers. Though from similar backgrounds, their responses to their encounter with England could not have been more different.

Manteo was convinced that securing his people's future meant working with the foreigners. After befriending Englishmen and learning English, he returned to North America as an interpreter and guide, helping English settlers navigate their often violent relationship with Algonquian society.

"Wanchese's experience of England pushed him in the opposite direction," writes David Veevers in his new book. Where Manteo anticipated collaboration, Wanchese saw an aggressive society that needed to be resisted

at all costs. On returning to his homeland, he slipped away from the English. Over the next few years, he led the Roanokes in their defence against the English onslaught.

Between 1500 and 1800, people across the world were faced with the conundrum that confronted Manteo and Wanchese: how to react to the arrival of British explorers, merchants, warriors and bureaucrats. Veevers' book tells the complex story of how these diverse peoples responded.

In part, it is a tale of successful defiance – a history of the many moments when Irish and indigenous American, Asian and African warriors defeated British forces, blocking or limiting the expansion of British power. We

// Resistance was accompanied by negotiation, sometimes cooperation, sometimes agreed separation //

learn, for example, of the tactics developed by Manteo's neighbours 150 miles to the north in Chesapeake Bay. To resist the rapid spread of English colonisers and their military firepower, the people lured the settlers with signs of friendship before attacking them. Elsewhere – and at the other end of the spectrum of firepower – was the massive Mughal military mobilisation that humiliated the East India Company in Bengal in the 1680s. That was followed a century later by catastrophe (for the British) at the battle of Pollilur in south India. Then there was Dahomey's victory in west Africa in the 1720s, which resulted in the execution of the British governor.

Resistance was anything but futile. It frequently successfully blocked the extension of British power. In 1800, when Veevers' story ends, Britons had spread throughout the globe but were dominant in few places.

Unstable boundaries

However, despite the book's title, defiance is only part of the narrative. 'The world' did not respond to the British empire in a single-minded way. Resistance was accompanied by negotiation, sometimes cooperation, sometimes agreed separation. In India, Mughal governors profited from gaining a new route via which to export products to Europe, so re-established connections after conflict. In the Caribbean, the English and French were forced to accept a treaty with the Kalinago that defined much of the region as off limits to Europeans. Usually, cooperation relied first on people putting Britons in their place. Much of Dahomey's power came from trading enslaved people with Europeans, but the Dahomeyan king insisted it happened on his own terms.

The Great Defiance does not shy away from documenting British brutality, nor from the violence of the indigenous responses. Despite his lively, engaging style, though, Veevers does not simplify. In his account, the boundary between 'empire' and its others was never stable and was often unclear. The history of early modern empire is full of figures who moved between sides. Some were of mixed descent,

so were pulled in different directions by their membership of two communities. Thomas 'Indian' Warner, for example, was the son of the first English governor in the Caribbean and a Kalinago woman. Raised but then rejected by his English family, he straddled two societies, becoming both leader of a large community of Kalinago, and deputy governor of the English settlement of 'Dominica'. Warner and his children were eventually killed by his half-brother, Philip – an act that divided English society in both the Caribbean and London.

David Veevers is sympathetic to the early modern world about which he writes. No single society or culture was able to dominate. When they arrived, Britons were usually "forced to give way to the hegemony of others". The world they encountered was a multipolar globe of colour and diversity, where hundreds of different societies responded in their own ways to their local environments.

Veevers' aim is to challenge the "drab" works "by generations of colonial authors" that describe non-Europeans as peoples without history, as "faceless 'natives' [or] simplistic cultures or barbaric despots". He shows that the early British empire encountered a "world that resonated power, populated by rich cultures, dynamic societies and prosperous economies". Veevers doesn't claim to be the first to offer such a perspective, but the breadth of his scope, spanning four continents over three centuries and drawing on a dazzling range of scholarship and primary sources, is novel.

The problem, perhaps, is that the British themselves seem too coherent. Rightly situating his story beyond the metropole, Veevers describes the British empire as a relentlessly expansive force, always pushing into the rest of the world – often rebuffed, but usually returning. We hear fragments of the very different motives that drove the British – profit, military glory, the spread of Christianity – as well as the arguments empire always caused. It would be good to hear more of those differences.

The point, though, is that the British are not really the subject of this book. Veevers' purpose is to quell what he calls the "dreary monotony of colonial storytelling", allowing "the vibrant world it once smothered [to] come to light". Driven by historical research, not present-day political concerns, this is nonetheless history for the real world now – for a world in which empire is long dead, and that is once again "a multipolar place of independent states" with power dispersed across every continent. *The Great Defiance* leaves us with a question with which some still struggle: what is Britain's place in such a world? **B**

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Jon Wilson is professor of modern history at King's College London. His next book, *Out of Chaos*, will be published in 2024

FROM FACT TO FICTION

Mesmerising murder

Ambrose Parry (writing couple Chris Brookmyre and Dr Marisa Haetzman) discuss *Voices of the Dead*, their latest historical thriller

Your new book is set in Edinburgh in 1853. How did you reconstruct life in the Victorian city?

We used various historical sources, including chloroform pioneer James Young Simpson's casebooks, plus the Scottish National Library's online collection of contemporary maps. It fires the imagination to look at buildings and imagine the events that might have transpired within their walls.

Marisa, how did you draw on your knowledge of medical history?

Mid-19th-century Edinburgh was a hive of medical innovation and discovery, but this era also coincided with a resurgence of interest in mesmerism and spiritualism. I was inspired by an incident in which Simpson disrupted a spiritualist demonstration, reflecting the battle between science and superstition.

Were any characters or events inspired by real life?

As well as Simpson and the noted police detective James McLevy, the book features Henry Littlejohn, who became Scotland's first Medical Officer for Health. We also took inspiration from the murder of Dr George Parkman, whose dismembered remains were found at Harvard Medical School in 1849.

In your book, medic Sarah Fisher is drawn to mesmerism. Did such fields provide more opportunities for women than orthodox medicine?

Marisa discovered an annual report that discussed opening up instruction in mesmerism to anyone who wished to learn. At a time when women were not allowed to study anything at university, let alone medicine, we imagined that Sarah might be more open-minded about mesmerism than male contemporaries who could afford to dismiss it as humbug.

Voices of the Dead

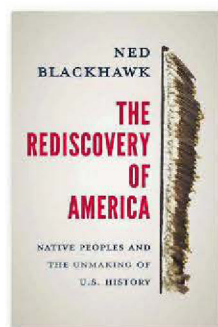
by Ambrose Parry
Canongate, 416 pages, £16.99



NORTH AMERICA

America rediscovered

CAROLINE DODDS PENNOCK acclaims an insightful exploration of the history of North America's Indigenous peoples since the era of European colonisation



The Rediscovery of America: Native Peoples and the Unmaking of US History
by Ned Blackhawk
Yale, 616 pages, £25

"How can a nation founded on the homelands of dispossessed

Indigenous peoples be the world's most exemplary democracy?" This is the opening contradiction, as well as the challenge at the heart of Ned Blackhawk's brilliant new book. In an era when Native peoples are still more likely to experience social and economic deprivation, and when language, cultural and environmental loss continue to plague their communities, this question has never been more urgent.

Since its foundation, when "Indians not taxed" (and thus not citizens) were explicitly excluded from the Constitution, the US has grappled with the presence of Native peoples within its borders. In his new book, Blackhawk shows how these struggles – over land, sovereignty, individualism and independence – are at the heart of how the modern US was formed. American power and rights were built – not only metaphorically but also legally and literally – on Indigenous foundations.

This is not just a history of Indigenous Americans but a book that reframes the past with Native peoples as equal protagonists in the history of what is now the US and, to a lesser extent, Canada. In doing so, Blackhawk sheds new light on familiar topics. Reorienting the history of the 1760s away from the tax troubles of eastern cities and towards the interior, he shows the struggle for control of the 'frontier', and the perception of crown support for Indigenous autonomy, as adding fuel to the conflagrations of the Revolutionary War. The fledgling republic was then built on the violent seizure of Native lands, as Washington sought to stabilise the economy and turn 'settlers' into 'citizens'. Meanwhile, the continuing illegal dispossession of Native lands and the hardening of 'whiteness' as a racial identity in the face of perceived Indigenous threats were elemental in the creation of American law and political cultures.



Back in the picture Women of the Atsina people, pictured in c1908. Ned Blackhawk's book "reframes the past with Native peoples as equal protagonists in the history of what is now the US", writes Caroline Dodds Pennock

// Since its foundation, the US has grappled with the presence of Native peoples within its borders //

This is just the start of Blackhawk's powerful contention that modern American ideals of citizenship, sovereignty, law and rights were built on the violent dispossession of Indigenous lands, and the legal struggles to conceptualise Native nations as sovereign powers within, yet beyond, US authority. After independence, the book tells of relentless attempts to eradicate Indigenous peoples – unceasingly challenged by activists and

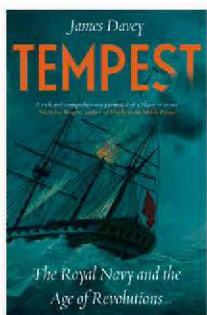
tribes, artists and intellectuals – as well as changing presidential policies into the post-Cold-War era, and the self-determination of the late 20th century. In doing so, he writes Native Americans back into the global history of modern America, ensuring his audience recognises them as living, breathing, evolving peoples, not the static ideals and stereotypes of so many stories.

In 'rediscovering' America, Blackhawk draws deeply from new scholarship to overturn stubborn historical tropes and damaging myths that erase Indigenous vibrancy and agency. His book will become an indispensable text for a generation of researchers, educators and students. Blackhawk urges us "to put down the interpretive tools of the previous century and take up new ones". It is time to put down the narratives of previous centuries and pick up this one. **II**

Caroline Dodds Pennock is the author of *On Savage Shores: How Indigenous Americans Discovered Europe* (W&N, 2023)

Choppy waters

ANDREW LAMBERT lauds a novel analysis of the impact of the French Revolutionary Wars on Britain's navy and society



Tempest: The Royal Navy and the Age of Revolutions

by James Davey
Yale, 448 pages, £25

James Davey's challenging alternative reading of Britain and its Royal Navy in the relatively unsuccessful

war against revolutionary France opens fresh perspectives on a critical period in British history, highlighting the challenge of radical politics in the 1790s. He argues that the impressment of sailors exposed deep rifts between officers and men, state and society, sparking widespread and violent resistance.

Persistent tensions over pay, conditions and recruitment culminated in the mutinies of 1797 at Spithead and the Nore, and continued after the war ended in 1802. Critically, naval protests interacted with slave risings in the Caribbean, rebellions in Ireland and popular protest in Britain – events that polarised society, empowering radical extra-parliamentary politics to challenge the legitimacy of the existing order. The new 'total' war – of long duration, mass mobilisation and the expansion of state power – required a new social contract. Though many unreformed 18th-century systems and structures – including plantation slavery – survived the conflicts of 1793–1815, the British state had been forced to compromise with sailors and subjects alike to survive the cultural and strategic challenge posed by a re-energised French state.



Pilot PM Pitt the Younger steers Britannia between democracy and monarchy in James Gillray's 1793 etching

Revolutionary France expanded across eastern and central Europe, spreading a radically different ideology, asset-stripping conquered provinces, plundering churches and imposing conscription. Having occupied the Low Countries (modern Belgium and the Netherlands), France was ideally placed to invade England. In 1793, Britain joined coalitions attempting to restore a balanced European state system. However, the collapse of those coalitions left Britain waging war alone against France, Spain, Russia, Prussia, Sweden and Denmark in 1801.

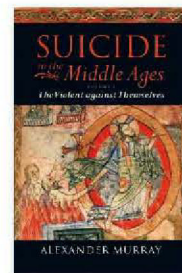
Naval success for Britain finally secured a compromise through the 1802 Peace of Amiens. Britain had avoided revolution, invasion and the destruction of the old order by making concessions at home, and such reforms continued – by consensus, and debate, rather than revolutionary explosion. Davey emphasises the role of print and propaganda in this period, with caricaturists Isaac Cruikshank and James Gillray developing new visions of Britishness, often linked to naval success.

Davey challenges old narratives of naval glory and political perspicacity, highlighting the experiences of the disenfranchised, ordinary sailors and their families, rebellious enslaved people, and others empowered to act by an era of revolution. He is less concerned by the experiences of French citizens, conscripted in their millions and expended in battle, or of the subjects of other polities overrun by those conscript armies, then plundered and exploited by rapacious generals. Britain avoided that fate, in large measure because of "the remarkable resilience of popular loyalism". That resilience reflected the reality that the alternative to George III and Pitt the Younger was French occupation. Loyalism persisted through the Napoleonic conflict, with the state exploiting new totems of glory and ever greater resources to wage war, ultimately securing a European coalition to bring down the French emperor.

After 1815, Pitt's political followers began the liberalisation of the British state. Yet while no one was impressed into the navy after 1814, millions were conscripted into the armed forces during the world wars – albeit by a very different British state. **H**

Andrew Lambert is Laughton professor of naval history at King's College London

Sophie Ambler on a powerful and influential study of **medieval people who died by suicide**



Suicide in the Middle Ages Volume 1: The Violent Against Themselves

by Alexander Murray
(OUP, 1998)

Some books, like people, mark you indelibly. The first part of Alexander Murray's *Suicide in the Middle Ages* taught me what history could be: ambitious in scope and humane in detail, rigorously researched and movingly written. This was the first of three volumes (the last is still awaited) in which Murray attempted "the mapping of mental desolation", hunting across the late medieval centuries in England, France, Germany and Italy for people who took their own lives. He found some 560 – by no means all of those whose suicide was recorded, let alone who died by suicide, but enough cases to discern patterns. For instance, three times as many medieval men as women took their own lives, comparable to 19th-century ratios.

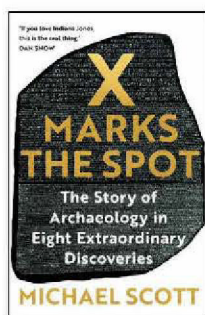
Murray's task was the excavation of each life and its end from unwilling sources. Suicides are elusive in the historical record. Victims often sought privacy – waiting to be alone in their house before fixing a noose, for example – so witnesses were few. Families sometimes concealed the act for shame or to avoid disinheritance. Chroniclers employed euphemisms ('dying of grief') to avoid breaking the taboo of 'self-murder'. Murray's book is, therefore, as much about how to track his subjects – through chronicles, legal records, miracle collections and more – as the subjects themselves. This is a lesson to the historian: not to be defeated by the historical precarity of challenging subjects, or to opt for easy stories easily told. Each precious life can be pulled from the historical cracks. **H**

Sophie Ambler is reader in medieval history at Lancaster University

ARCHAEOLOGY

Ancient insights

BRENNA HASSETT is enthralled by a vibrant take on key modern archaeological finds – and the equally colourful characters who made them



**X Marks the Spot:
The Story of
Archaeology in
Eight Extraordinary
Discoveries**
by Michael Scott
Hodder & Stoughton,
320 pages, £25

Michael Scott has produced both a breathless account of some of the most audacious adventures from the Enlightenment tradition of treasure hunting, and a sharp and insightful look at the deeper politics behind the treasure that archaeologists find. We begin in the late 18th century, with Napoleon, his soldiers and scientists invading Egypt and discovering the Rosetta Stone. Scott renders the complicated standoff between British naval forces, the dying Ottoman empire and the cultural aspirations of the French Revolution into a preface for what is to come: amazing discoveries underpinned by a dark web of politics and personalities.

The next adventure takes us deep into the world of the Great Game and China's austere Taklamakan Desert. This time the Brits are the ones backing Marc Aurel Stein as he – with his series of gallant canine companions, Dash I through VII – discovers the world's oldest printed text, dating back to AD 868, in a remote monastery cave in 1907. Hiram Bingham, who in 1911 brought the Incan citadel of Machu Picchu to the attention of the wider world, outdoes even the impeccably tailored Stein in setting the tone for what modern imaginations picture 'discovery' to be. Acknowledged as the inspiration for Indiana Jones, Bingham is very much the centre of his story, while his finds are relegated to dusty, unopened museum cabinets.

Empire lurks as a theme even in my favourite of the book's sections, covering Mary Leakey's 1978 discovery of pre-human footprints at Laetoli, northern Tanzania. In this well-researched chapter, the rather severe personalities involved are all invoked with the kind of details – in this case, descriptions of Dalmatians menaced by lions, and the hazards of rhinoceros urination – that make the book as a whole so enjoyable. Leakey



Treasure hunters French troops pause at an obelisk in Aswan during Napoleon's invasion of Egypt, 1799. The Rosetta Stone, discovered during this expedition, enabled the translation of ancient hieroglyphs

// Acknowledged as the inspiration for Indiana Jones, Hiram Bingham's finds are relegated to dusty museum cabinets //

worked in the brutal context of the end of the British empire in Africa, in which her husband was intricately involved.

Nation states are not exempt from these kinds of politics: the story of the discovery of the Terracotta Army near Xi'an shows how a blockbuster find – thousands of life-sized clay soldiers protecting the tomb of the first Qin emperor – might have been buried once more had it not served the political needs of the day.

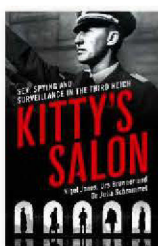
A ray of light in the dark history of treasure hunting appears with more collaborative recent discoveries, such as the wrecked ship of unimaginable Bronze Age luxuries found by sponge diver Mehmed Çakir at Uluburun, Turkey. Meanwhile, a personal connection with archaeologist Colin Renfrew illuminates the fascination of the broken Cycladic statuary found on the desolate Greek island of Keros – as well as the integral role played by tinned sardines in understanding humanity's past.

The shadow of geopolitics is never far away, though: it's cast over the contested border of Russia and China as researchers race to recover the frozen mummies of the Altai, and contributes to the very real threat that climate change poses to archaeology. This awareness of the many factors that underpin our knowledge of the past is what elevates *X Marks the Spot*, making it a volume well worth reading. **H**

Brenna Hassett is a bioarchaeologist and founder member of TrowelBlazers (trowelblazers.com). Her latest book is *Growing Up Human: The Evolution of Childhood* (Bloomsbury, 2022)

WWII

Erotic espionage



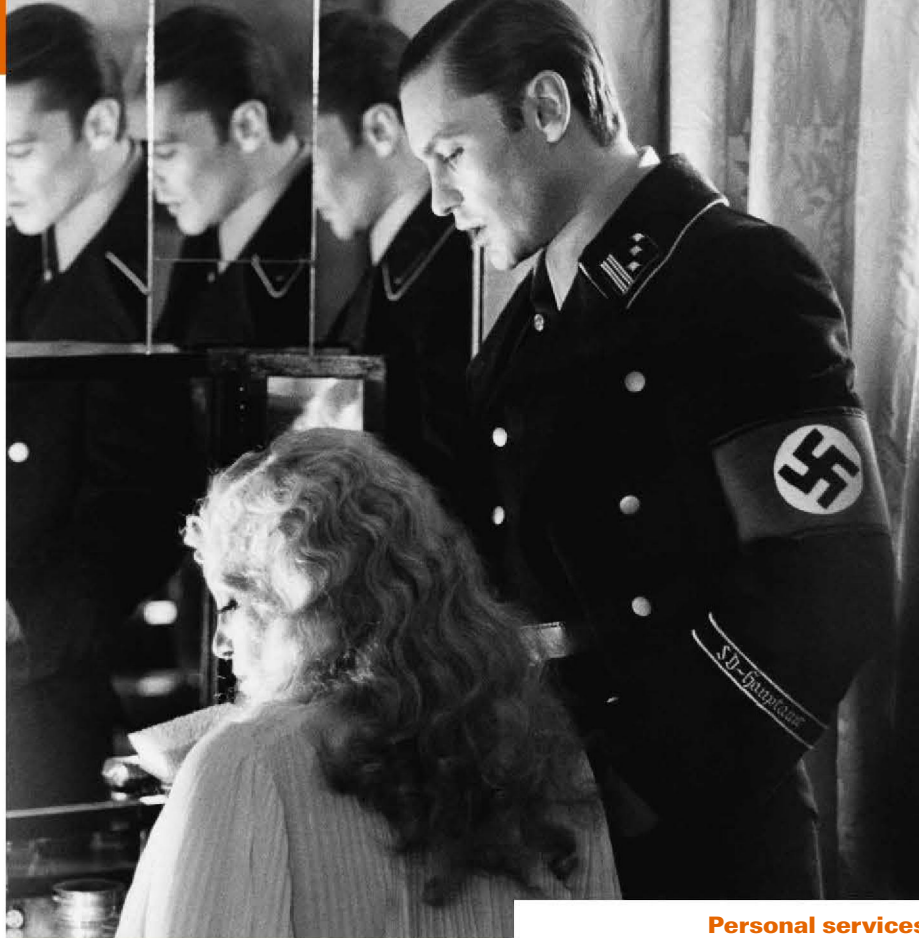
Kitty's Salon: Sex, Spying and Surveillance in the Third Reich

by Nigel Jones, Urs Brunner and Dr Julia Schrammel
John Blake, 320 pages, £22

The subtitle of this book tells you everything you need to know about its contents. Written by two journalists and originally published in German in 2020, the English language version is an expanded edition supported by historian and journalist Nigel Jones. It's all about Salon Kitty, a "sophisticated and stylish" brothel in war-time Berlin frequented by senior officials of the Nazi Party. It was, the authors maintain, more than just a sex joint – in fact, they point out, it was the hub of a spying operation through which vicious SS officer Reinhard Heydrich could extract information from and about his colleagues.

The 'Kitty' of the title – brothel madam Kitty Schmidt – has already been the subject of several books and films. But, as the authors observe, many questions remain about the precise role of her brothel and its workers, and whether it extended beyond providing purely carnal pleasures.

Kitty's Salon tries to answer these questions. Unfortunately, it never does. Much of the book isn't actually about the salon itself; indeed, the first half is a long exploration of



Personal services

Brothel madam Kitty (Ingrid Thulin) and her handler, Nazi intelligence officer Helmut (Helmut Berger), in the controversial 1976 film *Salon Kitty*

sex in the Third Reich, including some fairly lurid details of the sexual predilections of various leading Nazis. It is really only in the final third of the book that the salon itself features prominently. Even here, the authors concede that they don't really have any clear answers to the book's big questions, saying only:

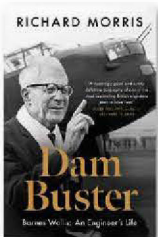
"We can be fairly certain that some sort of espionage operation did indeed take place in Salon Kitty." They fall short of providing details on what information was provided, by or

about whom, and what was done with this intelligence bounty. Still, it's an interesting book that's well written – even if it is much more concerned with sex under the Nazis than it is with spying and surveillance. **H**

.....
Michael Goodman, professor of intelligence and international affairs, King's College London

SCIENCE

Flawed genius



Dam Buster

by Richard Morris
W&N, 528 pages, £28

"If he was Britain's greatest engineer of the 20th century, where is his legacy?"

Rarely does a question feel so sacrilegious to ask, yet ring so uncomfortably true. This discordant feeling is prompted by Richard Morris's riveting biography of Barnes Wallis. The inventor of Upkeep – the legendary bouncing bomb from the Dam-busters raid – was also a master of geodetics, an expert in earthquake bombs and a

conceptualiser of swing-wing and supersonic aircraft.

Morris reminds us, though, that "airships and geodetics were dead ends; Upkeep in the end was a one-trick pony; Highball [another bouncing bomb] was never used; none of the late visions materialised." That Wallis's name remains little known beyond the idiosyncratic bubble of British wartime nostalgia leads Morris to wonder: does his esteemed reputation derive solely from his engineering prowess, or from the national fondness that Wallis and his era command?

The answer, it would appear, is both. Morris characterises Wallis as a flawed yet indomitable genius whose proposals did not always enjoy the optimal resources and circumstances to flourish. He was "an original thinker and, as his story has shown, originality brings risks". Yet Morris notes that

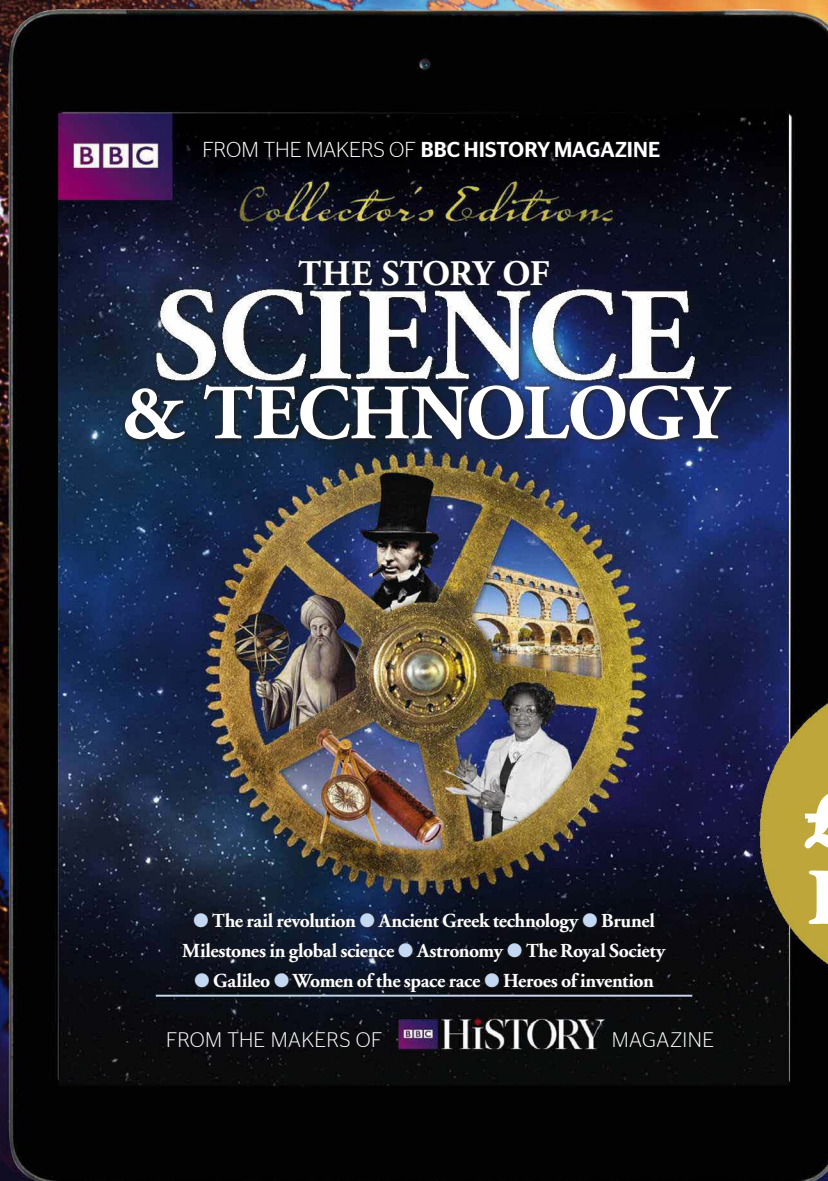
Wallis harboured an "intermittent sense of persecution" and consolidated the enduring national myth that his ideas were consistently thwarted by senior officials.

Admittedly, this myth has long been busted by historians. But the fastidious research that Morris has conducted on pinpointing the formation of this mindset – from early run-ins with school authority figures, to the redundancies and rejections that rocked his career – is unprecedented.

This biography is not recommended for Dambusters fans merely seeking a seat-of-the-pants flight over the Ruhr Valley; rather, it is a probing yet thoughtful account of the brilliant mind behind that raid and many other aeronautical feats. **H**

.....
Victoria Taylor, aviation historian, writer and broadcaster

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SCAN HERE

DIARY By Jonathan Wright, Paul Bloomfield and Samantha Nott
PODCAST Female enslavers
EXPLORE 878 AD, Winchester, Hampshire
TRAVEL Oslo in five places

ENCOUNTERS

VISIT

Face value

The Georgian era was a period of social, economic, intellectual and – as a new exhibition demonstrates – artistic transformation in Edinburgh. Marking the 200th anniversary of the death of renowned local artist Sir Henry Raeburn, the new display features 18 portraits of a diverse range of figures from the National Trust for Scotland's collections. These form the springboard for a bold exploration of his life and social milieu, telling the stories of the artist and his sitters through audio recordings, as well as examining the attitudes of Edinburgh society at the time.

Raeburn's Edinburgh

The Georgian House,
Edinburgh /
Until November /
[nts.org.uk/visit/places/
georgian-house](https://nts.org.uk/visit/places/georgian-house)

Henry Raeburn's portrait of Sarah, Lady Forbes of Craigievar. A new display at Edinburgh's Georgian House celebrates the work of the talented painter

WATCH

Power, corruption and lies

Surrounded as she was by ruthless people vying for power at a time of economic, political and religious turmoil, the world through which the orphaned Elizabeth Tudor moved was famously fraught with risk. Created by British writer Anya Reiss, *Becoming Elizabeth* takes this idea and imagines her unique experience of teenage life.

Starring Alicia von Rittberg, the series makes much of the connection between sex and power, notably in its portrayal of the way Thomas Seymour (played with sly charm by Tom Cullen) preys on the future monarch. Also starring are Romola Garai as Mary Tudor and Jessica Raine as Henry's widow, Katherine Parr.

Becoming Elizabeth

Channel 4 / Summer

Alicia von Rittberg plays the future Elizabeth I in a fictionalised account of her teenage life



Paris Jazz musician Albert Fallou (Parker Sawyers) faces the brutal reality of German occupation in *World on Fire*

WATCH

Lives transformed

With filming delayed by the pandemic, it has taken some time for the second series of *World on Fire* to reach the small screen – but it should be worth the wait. Writer Peter Bowker's ambitious drama continues to explore the Second World War through stories of people caught up in momentous events.

The new episodes begin in the latter half of 1940. The Blitz is under way, with German bombers targeting Britain's industrial cities. In north Africa, soldiers from India, Australia and other parts of the British empire struggle to adapt to desert combat. Much of Europe is under

German occupation and hope is in short supply.

Returning cast members include Lesley Manville as wealthy Robina Chase; Jonah Hauer-King as her son, Harry, a translator who escapes Warsaw to serve with the Special Operations Executive; and Zofia Wichłacz as Kasia Tomaszewski, a Polish waitress who joins the resistance. Among several new cast members, Miriam Schiweck stars as Marga, a member of the Band of German Maidens, the girls' wing of the Hitler Youth.

World on Fire

BBC One / July



Bettany Hughes delves into the history and culture of India in her new Channel 4 series

WATCH

Indian vistas

Ever the globetrotter, Bettany Hughes heads for India on a mission to explore the country's archaeology, architecture and culture. In the first of two episodes, Hughes travels in the north, where she learns about India's diverse religious traditions. In the holy city of Varanasi, she takes part in an emotional ceremony to honour her recently departed mother.

The focus of the second episode turns to regional histories and cultures in southern India. Highlights include a trip on the vertiginous Nilgiri Mountain Railway. In the highlands, Hughes spends time with a group of Toda women, whose traditional way of life revolves around honouring nature and the environment.

Exploring India's Treasures with Bettany Hughes

Channel 4 / July



The seven dwarfs mourn Snow White in the 1937 Disney film – the world's first full-length cel-animated feature

LISTEN

Cinematic pioneer

In 1923, Walt Disney and his elder brother, Roy O Disney, established the Disney Brothers Studio. Walt was just 21 years old, and the animation industry was in its infancy. Latterly, the Disney name has become associated with a kind of corporate cosiness – yet, as a new series hosted by Mel Giedroyc and which focuses on 10 of his greatest works makes clear, Walt was a visionary who constantly disrupted the status quo.

Steamboat Willie, for example, which in 1928 introduced Mickey and Minnie Mouse to the wider world, was one of the first cartoons to employ synchronised sound. Later, many people thought Disney to be misguided and even crazy when he decided to make *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), the world's first cel-animated feature. The film cost around \$1.5m to make, an enormous sum at the time. Not for the first or last time, Disney's risk-taking left him facing potential ruin. But *Snow White* was a soaring success, raking in more than \$400m since its release.

The series also charts Walt's depression and explores how his storytelling was in so many ways an escape from the malign influence of an overbearing father.

Walt Disney: A Life in Films

BBC Radio 4 & BBC Sounds / Airing now (Thursdays)

HISTORY ON THE AIRWAVES

"No one's pretending Jewish humour is going to stop antisemitism, but it disempowers prejudice"



Comedian **DAVID SCHNEIDER** (left), presenter of a new Radio 4 programme about Jewish comedy, tells us how Jewish humour has evolved over the decades – often as a response to antisemitism

Your new documentary begins in 1903 with US-born émigré comedian Julian Rose [1868–1935], who became famous in the UK. Why is he important?

At a relatively early point, he did Jewish humour in English, and therefore made it accessible to the host community. That wasn't usual, because most Jewish immigrants were Yiddish speakers. He played on... shall we say, problematic stereotypes [Rose was billed as 'Our Hebrew Friend'], but it's a good place to start, in as much as he found celebrity.

What are the differences between Jewish humour in the US and the UK?

There's a boldness about Jewish humour in America that precedes by three or four decades a boldness we're now finding in the UK. Historically, that was partly because of the Jewish impresarios who started Hollywood studios. Even though they weren't telling Jewish stories, they were telling stories with a Jewish ethos, if you like – of the outsider making it big, which is the American Dream.

Also, America was built by immigrant communities, so there was a greater ease about being Jewish. Danny Kaye came from Yiddish theatre, and others – Sid Caesar, Mel Brooks, Woody Allen – had this kind of Jewish rhythm, so there's a sense that the patter of Jewish comedy set a template.

I suppose my thesis is that Jewish comedy and minority comedy are very similar. In a way, the first 'Jewish' comedy show in the UK was *Goodness Gracious Me*. I recognised that feeling of being in a minority and celebrating yourselves.

You look at Mel Brooks' 1967 film *The Producers*. What should we make of [musical] *Springtime For Hitler*?

I watched the film again, and it's breathtaking in its courage in just being that funny

– the extreme to which he pushed that ridicule. My mum, a Holocaust survivor, was uncomfortable with it – but, if my mum forgives me, I would disagree. Brooks gets away with it because he's got the context of the story [theatre producers deliberately trying to engineer a tasteless flop] and the audience reacting [in stony-faced shock].

Antisemitism has been on the rise.

What does history tell us about the role of Jewish humour in such times?

It was Peter Cook who famously said that satire is incredibly powerful: "Those wonderful Berlin cabarets which did so much to stop the rise of Hitler." No one's pretending that Jewish humour is going to stop antisemitism, but it disempowers prejudice by exposing it to ridicule. Even in the camps, humour was rife. **H**

Archive on 4: Shticks and Stones: Jewish Comedy and Antisemitism **BBC 4** RADIO
will air on BBC Radio 4 on 29 July



American comic actor Danny Kaye, pictured in 1941. He was one of many influential Jewish performers and writers in the US



Weekly TV & radio

Visit historyextra.com for updates on upcoming TV and radio programmes



TASTE

Pastel de choclo (maize pie)

This mestizo dish, adapting the Spanish beef-filled empanada pastry by replacing wheat pastry with a creamy sweetcorn topping, is Chile's favourite homemade meal – and a historic example of fusion cuisine. Its origins may lie in the kitchens of Spanish colonial settlers in Chile, with native Mapuche cooks blending the two culinary traditions. Others point to 16th-century accounts from Conquistador-era Peru. Either way, it's a hearty dish that's hugely popular across the region, with many variant recipes and methods.

Serves: 6 to 8
Difficulty: 5/10
Time: 1.5 hours

INGREDIENTS

For the topping:
 8 sweetcorn (maize) cobs
 1.5 tbsp cornmeal
 1.5 tbsp caster sugar

For the filling:
 1kg minced beef
 500g cooked chicken pieces
 3 large onions
 2 garlic cloves, chopped
 120ml beef stock
 1 tbsp cumin
 125g black olives, pitted
 125g raisins
 2 hard-boiled eggs
 100ml milk
 Salt and pepper to taste
 Butter or vegetable oil

METHOD

1. Preheat the oven to 200°C. Peel and slice hard-boiled eggs.



Pastel de choclo combines American sweetcorn with a Spanish-style beef-based filling

2. Chop onions and fry in butter or oil until soft. Add garlic, salt, pepper, cumin and minced meat; fry for about 5 minutes until lightly browned. Add stock and simmer over a low heat for 20 minutes, or until the liquid has reduced.
3. Cut the kernels off the corncobs and cook in milk in a saucepan for 5 minutes, or until milk has been absorbed. Season well. Blend in a liquidiser until almost smooth.

4. Sprinkle the cornmeal into the maize mixture, then cook on a low heat for five minutes, stirring to avoid burning.
5. Place mince mixture into an ovenproof dish, add chicken, olives and raisins, and top with egg slices. Ladle corn mixture on top, sprinkle with sugar, and bake for 35 minutes or until browned. Serve immediately.

Adapted from a recipe at: eatingchile.blogspot.com

VISIT

Words as bonds

A book isn't merely a bound ream of paper – particularly when it's a gift. It can be a token of friendship, a religious offering, a way of sealing a political alliance. A display of artefacts from Oxford's Bodleian Libraries explores the production, motivation, meaning and impact of manuscripts and other gifts through the ages. Displays range from ancient Sumerian tablets and a decorated Indian Qur'an to the handwritten text prepared by the future Elizabeth I for her stepmother Katherine Parr in 1544 – an attempt to create an ally within the capricious Tudor court.

Gifts and Books

Weston Library, Oxford / Until 29 October / Free entry / visit.bodleian.ox.ac.uk

This guitar was given by the poet Percy Shelley to his friend Jane Williams



Boxer Marian 'Lady Tyger' Trimmar in New York, 1974. The first female boxers in the city fought sexism in and out of the ring

WATCH

Hitting back

Today, a few select female boxers can earn \$1m a year and more through the sport, but it wasn't always like this. Filmmaker Georgina Cammalleri's documentary takes us to New York in 1974, a down-at-heel and nearly bankrupt city. Racial prejudice and sexism were rife.

This was also a time when women from different walks of life decided to take up

boxing, only to be told they were too delicate to compete and denied licences to get in to the ring.

Rather than giving up, the women took on the New York State Athletic Commission in court – a moment that inspired other women and changed the sport forever.

Right to Fight

Sky Documentaries / July



A south Asian man in Trinidad, c1900. A new exhibition in London explores the experiences of Indian labourers in the Caribbean

VISIT

New labour

The arrival of the *Empire Windrush* 75 years ago was a turning point in the migration of then-colonial citizens from the West Indies to Britain. But another wave of transatlantic movement is the focus of an exhibition looking at the experiences of indentured labourers from south Asia. From the 1830s, some 450,000 Indians were recruited as cheap labour to work on Caribbean plantations in

place of formerly enslaved people. Their stories are examined through letters, postcards, film, photos and artwork, plus personal memories from the Indo-Caribbean community in London, where many settled in the 20th century.

Indo + Caribbean: The creation of a culture

Museum of London Docklands /
Until 19 November / museumoflondon.org.uk

WATCH

A bigger bang

As director of the Los Alamos Laboratory during the Second World War, and the man who, more than anyone else, drove the Manhattan Project forward, physicist J Robert Oppenheimer was dubbed the 'father of the atomic bomb'. In the wake of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, we understand all too well both the destructive power Oppenheimer helped to unleash and his key role in 20th-century history – but how might we see his life and work anew?

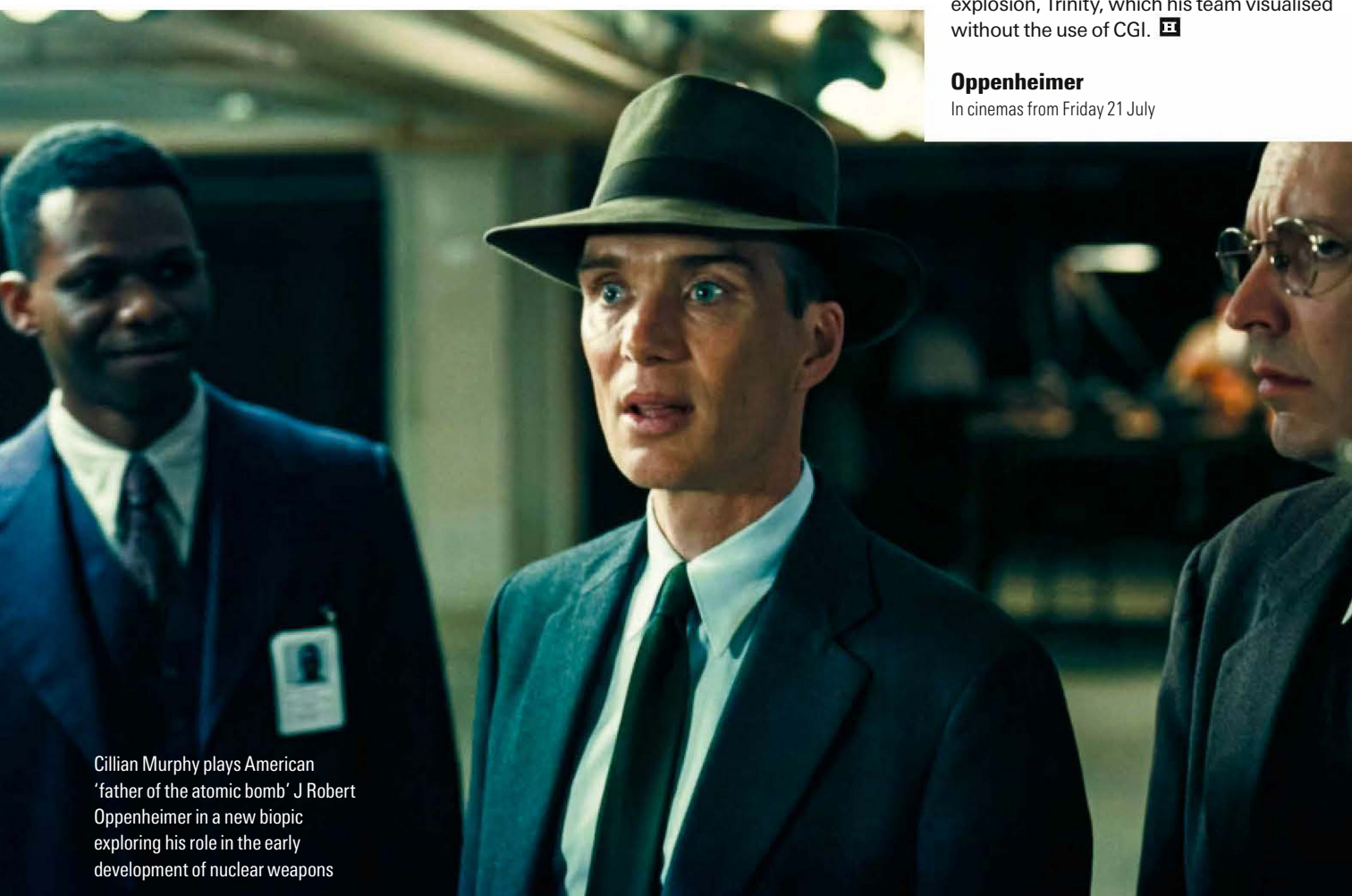
A new biopic from Christopher Nolan (*Dunkirk*) adopts the approach of trying, as far as possible, to show events from the perspective of Oppenheimer himself. Working in real time at the cutting edge of science, he has no idea whether or not he will succeed.

The cast of *Oppenheimer* is stellar. Cillian Murphy imbues the title character with the same eerie intensity he brought to *Peaky Blinders*. Emily Blunt, Matt Damon, Robert Downey Jr and Florence Pugh are among the stars in supporting roles.

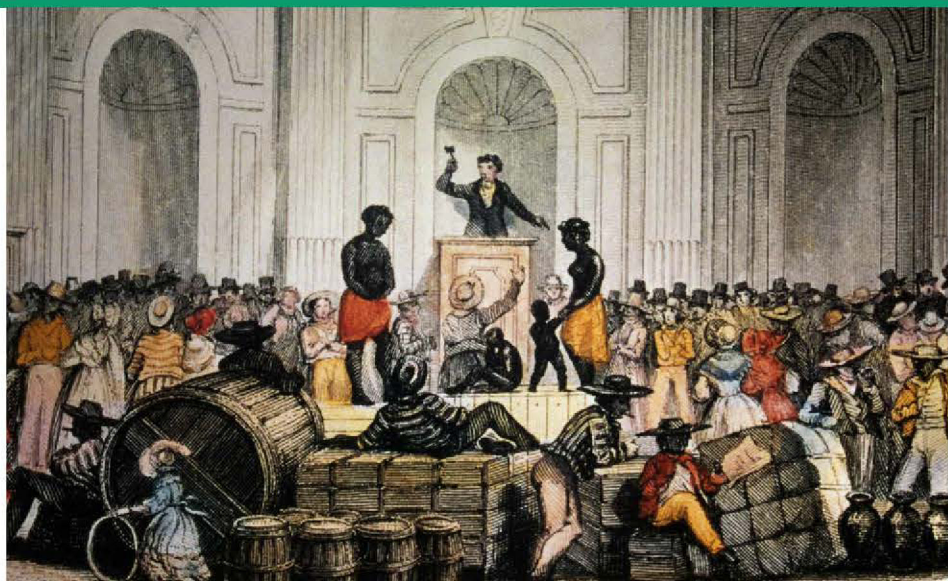
It's drama designed to be viewed on the biggest screen possible – if only to see how Nolan handles the first-ever nuclear test explosion, Trinity, which his team visualised without the use of CGI. **B**

Oppenheimer

In cinemas from Friday 21 July



Cillian Murphy plays American 'father of the atomic bomb' J Robert Oppenheimer in a new biopic exploring his role in the early development of nuclear weapons



A slave market in 19th-century Louisiana. Women's participation in this brutal trade is often overlooked

The other slave owners



Our podcast editor **ELLIE CAWTHORNE** discusses a recent episode on women's role in sustaining the slave trade

“Sure enough, if you dig deeper, you can find copious evidence that women bought and sold enslaved people, not just for their own personal gain, but also for profit,” Stephanie E Jones-Rogers told me on the podcast recently. One of the recipients of this year's Dan David Prize for outstanding historical scholarship, she joined me to discuss her research into the deeply rooted connections between white women and slave ownership in the American South.

Women are often overlooked in discussions about slave owners and slave traders, argues Jones-Rogers, but if you look beyond the traditional sources used to study the mechanics of the slave trade (which were primarily created for and by men), the scale of women's complicity and involvement in the system begins to emerge. A key resource for Jones-Rogers is the testimonies given by formerly enslaved people, who “often talked in-depth about the women who were responsible for their enslavement, who had bought, sold and hired them”.

An uncomfortable truth is that in an era when women had few financial freedoms, one route into the economy was through investing in the slave trade. Some women bought enslaved people to act as wet nurses, while others forced them into

brothels. One New Orleans woman partnered with her nephew to buy sick enslaved people, nurse them back to health and sell them on for a higher price. This woman, like many others, didn't passively acquire or inherit enslaved people – she was actively engaged in a business venture in which profits were split down the middle.

This was despite multiple impediments to women owning property, which enslaved people were legally categorised as being. As Jones-Rogers explained: “Women had to jump through multiple hoops in order to own enslaved people, which suggests that they were in many respects more determined to do so than their male counterparts.”

One instance that really stuck with Jones-Rogers from her research was an enslaved man's account of his mistress buying a dress. In order to afford it, she decided to sell an enslaved person. “That story seemed to me a really short and simple way of demonstrating how deeply invested women were in the institution of slavery, and how their lives were sustained by it.” **H**



Listen now

Find this episode at historyextra.com/women-slave-owners-pod



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Separation and survival

In South Carolina, during the 1850s, an enslaved woman named Rose packed a sack containing a few precious items for her nine-year-old daughter Ashley.

Ashley was then separated from her mother and sold, and it's likely the two never saw each other again. **Tiya Miles** joined me to unpack the contents of Ashley's sack, exploring what each of the items it held – from a handful of pecans to a braid of hair – can tell us about women's experiences of slavery. historyextra.com/ashleys-sack-pod



Unwelcome inheritance

While researching his family history, author **Alex Renton** made a troubling discovery: his ancestors had owned plantations in Tobago and

Jamaica that were worked by enslaved people. Renton joined me in 2021 to discuss the process of uncovering this history for his book *Blood Legacy*, and gave his take on the contentious issue of whether reparations for slavery should be made, who should make them and who should benefit.

historyextra.com/blood-legacy-pod



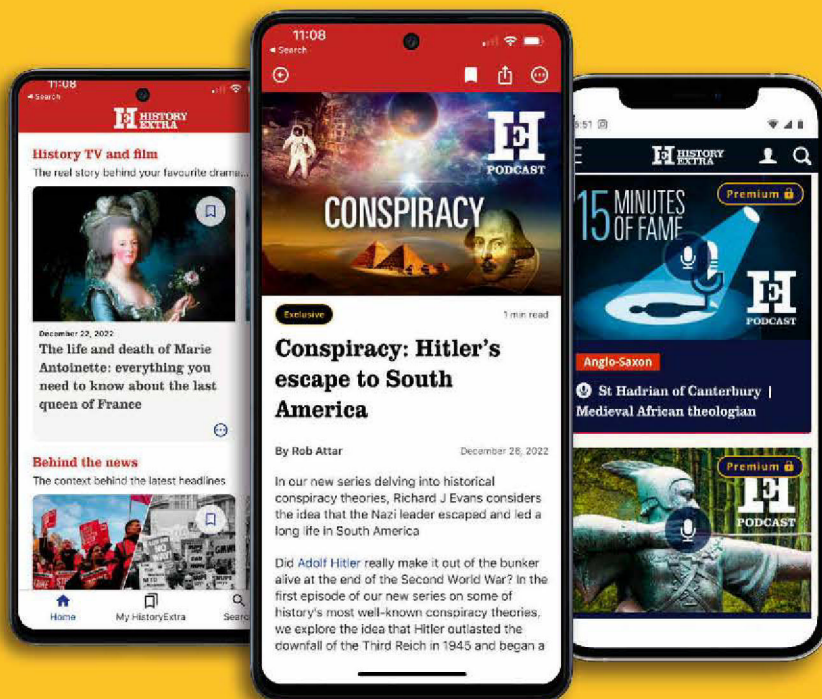
Enslaved women

Gender played a significant role in the brutalities experienced by enslaved people, and in 2020 **Stella Dadzie** joined me to discuss the lives

of enslaved women in the West Indies. We touched on the difficulties of locating their voices in the historical record, the inventive ways in which women resisted their oppressors and the grim realities of daily life for women on plantations. historyextra.com/enslaved-women-pod



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City on the brink of battle

Hidden away in an unassuming shopping centre lies a doorway to the distant past. **EMILY BRIFFETT** steps back in time to discover the contested world of Anglo-Saxon Winchester

When you step through a door in a modern mall, the last thing you expect is to be cordially greeted by an Anglo-Saxon noblewoman – or ominously warned of imminent Viking attack. But in the Brooks Shopping Centre in Winchester, that is exactly what you get.

Inhabited since the Iron Age, Winchester has a rich history spanning more than 2,000 years. However, its early medieval prominence as a major cultural, religious and administrative centre has dominated the public imagination – especially its association with King Alfred the Great. This connection has been enhanced further in recent years through its appearance as a location in Ubisoft's 2020 video game *Assassin's Creed Valhalla* and the Netflix series *The Last Kingdom*.

Despite the statue of Alfred gazing along the Broadway towards the High Street, there's little evidence that the famous king ever visited the city. Yet during his reign Winchester was at the forefront of his town-building programme across Wessex. Its old Roman walls were restored, and one of the kingdom's most important mints was established here.

Hampshire Cultural Trust's recently opened 878 AD experience zooms in on this history, focusing on that pivotal year in the Anglo-Saxon world when Winchester stood on the brink of catastrophe. "It marked a big moment in Alfred's reign – a point when the West Saxon kingdom was really on its uppers," explains historian Ryan Lavelle, a member of the 878AD advisory board. "Vikings had taken parts of the kingdom and, though they hadn't yet seized Winchester, it was a moment when Wessex might stand or fall."

In fact, the attack feared by the people of Winchester didn't come. Instead, the fateful

clash between Alfred's forces and the Viking Great Army took place at Edington, where the Anglo-Saxon king claimed a decisive victory over the Danish leader Guthrum.

Although that battle was fought some 40 miles north-west of Winchester, in what's now Wiltshire, the tension before the clash must have been palpable here. As a prosperous royal centre, the stakes were high. "The 878 AD experience gives us a sense of the people of Winchester responding to this big historical event," explains Lavelle. "It shows how the everyday life of an ordinary person was affected by the adversity of not knowing what might happen."

Stepping into the exhibition, I'm immediately confronted with the stresses and worries of people on the brink of war. I encounter a fearful noblewoman furiously writing her will, while a desperate enslaved man mulls making a break for freedom.

Drawing on a wealth of material culture from the many excavations undertaken around the city over the decades, Hampshire Cultural Trust teamed up with Ubisoft to recreate the atmosphere of early medieval Winchester. Aromas from a smoky fire and a bubbling stew meld with street sounds to create a heady ambience, while interactive panels and artefact displays add to the rich multisensory experience. Eagle-eyed visitors can even spot the Winchester Reliquary, a decorated gilt Anglo-Saxon container holding a holy relic, used for worship and possibly as a portable altar by medieval Christians.

After immersing myself in the colour and culture of the exhibition, I head out to explore the city streets using the self-guided augmented-reality app *878 AD: Winchester Revealed*. Strolling the cobbles of Anglo-Saxon England, I tackle challenges and puzzles – all the while discovering how the modern street layout offers yet more insights into the city's early medieval past. **H**

// A fearful noblewoman writes her will while a desperate enslaved man mulls a break for freedom //

Emily Briffett is editorial assistant for our HistoryExtra podcast



For more information on the attraction, head to 878ad.co.uk



Costumed re-enactors evoke the activities of everyday life for the ordinary people of ninth-century Winchester in the 878 AD experience



Interactive displays explore the worlds of *Assassin's Creed Valhalla*, the computer game that largely takes place in Winchester during its Anglo-Saxon heyday



An augmented-reality app guides visitors around the city streets, revealing long-vanished medieval sites



A statue of Alfred the Great, commissioned in 1899 to mark the anniversary of his death, stands guard over Winchester

Oslo in five places

Norway's capital has a rich and varied past. **ELEANOR ROSAMUND BARRACLOUGH** highlights five sites that shine fresh light on the city's culturally diverse heritage

① Holmenkollen Sheer spectacle

Look north-west of the city centre and you'll see a huge, gleaming construction in the hills: Holmenkollen ski jump. This spot has hosted ski competitions for well over a century, though the current structure is just over a decade old. There's an amazing viewing platform at the top, providing sweeping vistas across Oslo, while at its foot is the immersive Ski Museum, which covers 4,000 years of skiing history, from prehistoric rock carvings and medieval skis to equipment used by famous Norwegian explorers Fridtjof Nansen and Roald Amundsen and beyond. (The museum is, however, closed for refurbishment for most of 2023.)

Continue a little farther north for another slice of history at Frognerseteren, a wonderful 19th-century wooden house at the top of a toboggan run. It's carved with dragons and all sorts of twirls and twiddles, and looks like my idea of Valhalla – the home of Odin's chosen warriors in the afterlife, according to the Old Norse myths. Right from the beginning there was a tradition here of welcoming travellers in to warm up and get something to eat, and the cafe is still a great place for cake and coffee today.



The Holmenkollen ski jump and a statue of late 19th-century explorer Fridtjof Nansen

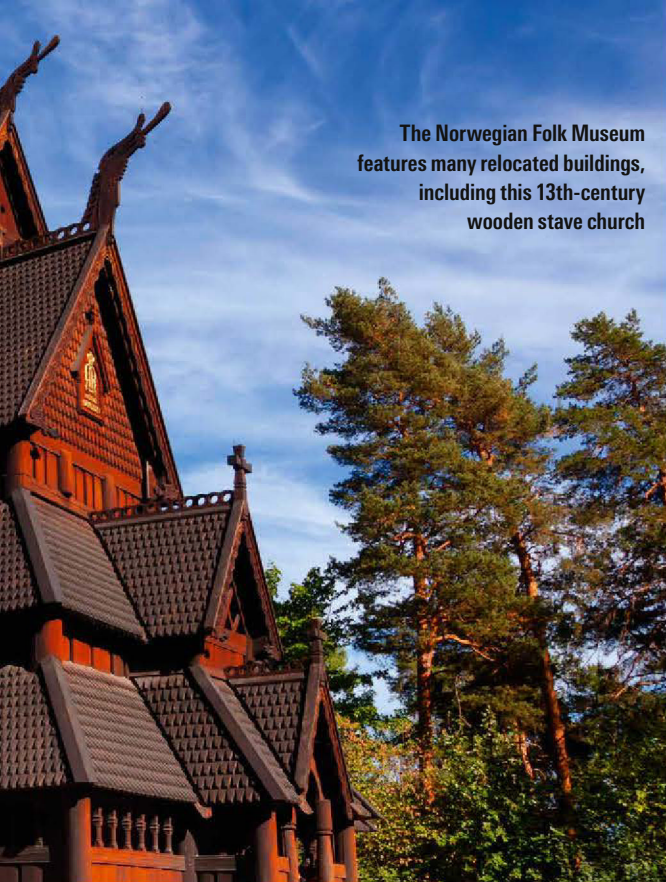


Viking artefacts
abound at the
Historical Museum,
though many will move
to a new home in 2026



② Historical Museum Norse-powered heritage

Funnily enough, Oslo isn't awash with Viking Age sites. There's the Viking Ship Museum, which houses three extraordinary ship burials from that period, but it's currently closed; it will reopen in 2026 as the Museum of the Viking Age. In the meantime, you'll find an impressive array of artefacts from that period (roughly AD 750–1050) at the Historical Museum, in the city centre near the Royal Palace. Expect to see magnificent swords, diverse items from Viking burials, and many more objects related to this formative era – many of which will be moved to the new museum when it opens. The museum also has good displays about the history of the Sami, the indigenous people of northern Scandinavia.



The Norwegian Folk Museum features many relocated buildings, including this 13th-century wooden stave church



Why was Oslo renamed Christiania?

Eleanor explores Oslo's fascinating history on our podcast: hexpodcast.podlink.to/Cities



Ellen Jacobsen's *Fabrikkjentene* celebrates the women who worked in Oslo's textile industry



5 Fabrikkjentene and Labour Museum Factory records

During the industrial revolution, water-powered textile mills sprang up along Akerselva, the river that divided the city between the wealthier, smarter western quarter and the more working-class east. Many of the brick-built 19th-century factory buildings and warehouses survive – though much gentrified now, of course – and a stroll along the beautiful riverside path is a wonderful way of discovering this grittier part of Oslo's heritage, passing all sorts of blue plaques and other historical nuggets en route.

A couple of miles north of the harbour, you'll find the fascinating Labour Museum (open weekends), with revealing displays about local working and living conditions as well as the industrial revolution more generally. Amble over nearby Beierbrua (the Beier Bridge) to find the bronze sculpture *Fabrikkjentene* (the Factory Girls) by Ellen Jacobsen, a moving tribute to the many women who toiled in Oslo's textile factories. **EH**

Eleanor Rosamund Barraclough lectures in history at Bath Spa University. Her latest book is *Beyond the Northlands: Viking Voyages and the Old Norse Sagas* (Oxford University Press, 2016). She was talking to **Paul Bloomfield**, the host of HistoryExtra's new podcast series, History's Greatest Cities

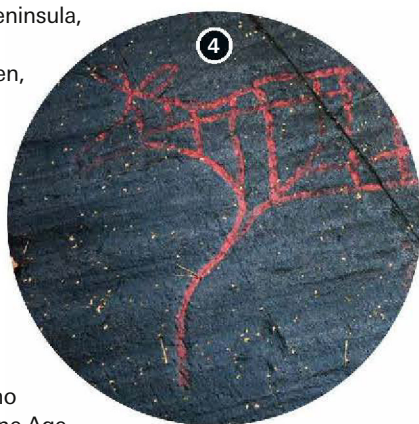
3 Norsk Folkemuseum Culture club

The magical Norwegian Folk Museum shows how people lived in this region during past centuries. It's partly an open-air museum, with a large collection of historical buildings – some from Oslo, others collected from around the country and rebuilt here. One highlight is a huge wooden stave church, ornately carved and tiered a little like a wedding cake, that dates from around AD 1200. You can also explore turf-roofed timber farm buildings from the 17th century, and brick townhouses from the rebuilding of the city as Christiania after the great fire of 1624. The museum itself houses exhibitions on folk dress and art, and on Sami culture. Depending on when you visit, you might also encounter a folk festival – midsummer or Christmas celebrations, for example.

The Folk Museum is on the Bygdøy peninsula, where you'll also find the Fram Museum, dedicated to polar explorer Fridtjof Nansen, and the Kon-Tiki Museum, covering the expeditions of Thor Heyerdahl.

4 Ekeberg Prehistory rocks

To find evidence of the first people to live in the Oslo region, head south-east of the city centre to Ekeberg – 'Oak Mountain'. Those earliest inhabitants, who lived around the Oslofjord during the Stone Age between 4,000 and 5,000 years ago, left carvings on the rocks depicting deer, elk and birds, plus one smaller human figure, giving us an insight into the lives of the people who made them. Ekeberg continued to be inhabited over the millennia – Bronze Age ritual sites and Iron Age burial mounds have been found in the area, too. The hill is now also home to the extraordinary Ekeberg Sculpture Park, showcasing work by or featuring women.

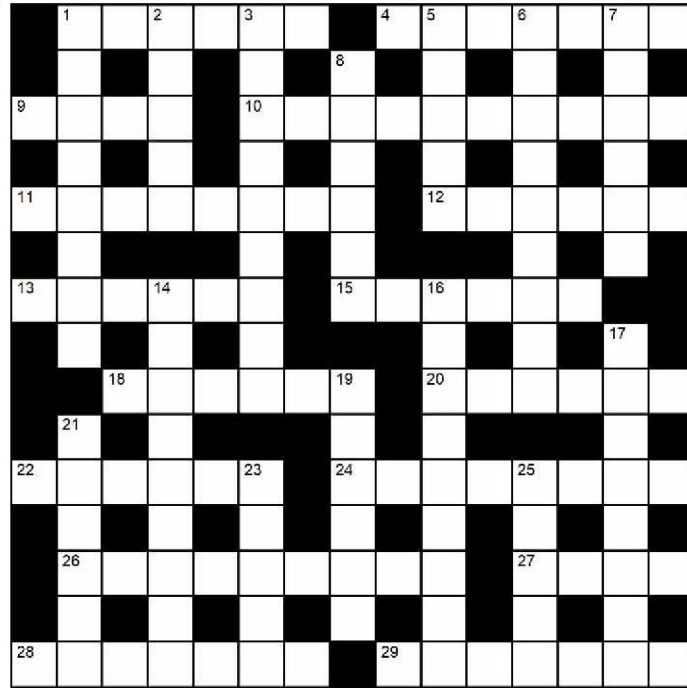


Oslo's earliest known inhabitants left rock carvings depicting animals, including this one at Ekeberg

PRIZE CROSSWORD

Across

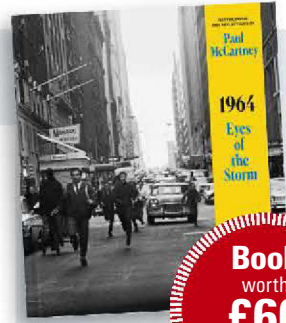
- 1** George ____, poet famous for grim verse tales like *The Borough* (1810), a basis for the opera *Peter Grimes* (6)
- 4** Francisco de ____, first viceroy of Portuguese India (1505–9) (7)
- 9** Chinese dynasty (960–1279), historically treated as two separate periods, 'Northern' and 'Southern' (4)
- 10** Battle of the Anglo-Zulu war, a big defeat for the British Army, though it dashed the Zulu king's hopes for a negotiated resolution (10)
- 11** US army officer, 'Vinegar Joe' ____, who became Chiang Kai-shek's chief of staff (8)
- 12** Hertha Marks ____, distinguished British physicist and a member of the suffragette movement in the early 20th century (6)
- 13** Robert ____, 16th/17th-century English church leader, who gave his name to a Separatist movement (6)
- 15** An early Iraqi territorial claim to this Gulf State coincided with the discovery of oil there in 1938 (6)
- 18** An ancient biblical town of Samaria; also, a major battle (April 1862) of the American Civil War (6)
- 20** Member of one of the raider bands along the Anglo-Scottish border in the 13th–16th centuries (6)
- 22** One of many Japanese feudal lords served by samurai warriors during the shogunate (6)
- 24** 20th-century Welsh painter, now often considered to be a superior artist to her brother Augustus, who overshadowed her during her lifetime (4,4)
- 26** Much of the old part of this European capital city was demolished in the 1980s to make way for the notorious building that is now the Palace of Parliament (9)
- 27** A highly successful leader during this Chinese dynasty was empress Wu Zetian (4)
- 28/19** Historian, broadcaster and author of *Helen of Troy: Goddess, Princess, Whore* (7,6)
- 29** City known as 'Florence on the Elbe' that experienced devastating Allied bombing during the Second World War (7)



Down

- 1** Subsistence farmers who suffered especially during the 18th/19th-century Highland Clearances (8)
- 2** ____ Falls in South America, named after the US aviator who crash-landed nearby in the 1930s (5)
- 3** London palace built for Henry VIII, later used partly as a house of correction, becoming a nickname for a prison (9)
- 5** Ancient land of Asia Minor whose people may be the first westerners to have minted gold and silver coins (5)
- 6** The English king whose claim to the French throne led to the Hundred Years' War (6,3)
- 7** A major figure of the French Revolution; his moderate views in the Reign of Terror led to his public execution (6)
- 8** (One spelling of) a slave soldier, regularly used in Muslim armies from the 9th century (6)
- 14** Official name of the combined army, navy and air forces of the Third Reich (9)
- 16** The last major battle of the Civil War took place here (September 1651) (9)
- 17** Remains of an early Bronze Age timber circle, discovered in Norfolk in 1998 (8)
- 19** See 28 across
- 21** Last name of a Gestapo leader, known as the 'Butcher of Lyon' (6)
- 23** Welsh leader of a 15-year-long rebellion against English rule in the 15th century, ____ Glyndwr (5)
- 25** Members of Germanic tribe which, along with the Angles and Saxons, invaded Britain in the 5th century (5)

Compiled by **Eddie James**



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1964: Eyes of the Storm By Paul McCartney

Today Paul McCartney is enshrined as a musical legend – but in the early sixties, he and his fellow Beatles were just starting their meteoric rise to global fame. The world of the early sixties comes to life in this fascinating book, which brings together hundreds of photographs taken by McCartney himself at a time when Beatlemania was taking over the world.

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Solution to our June 2023 crossword

Across 7 Algiers 8 Champa 9 Ahab 10 Somerville 12 Franks
13 Reigate 15 Great Famine 19 Vespucci 20 Dubcek 21 Kublai Khan
23 Lens 24 Trojan 25 Babylon
Down 1 Althorp 2 Ribbentrop 3 Crisis 4 Chartism 5 Impi 6 Baalbek
11 Mary Frith 14 Anne Boleyn 16 Archival 17 Jesuit 18 Meinhof
20 Duncan 22 Laos

Four winners of X Marks the Spot

B Doherty, Greater Manchester; V Brocklehurst, East Riding of Yorkshire; R Thwaite, Greater Manchester; D Allman, Somerset

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What is the real name of the city often called 'Florence on the Elbe'? (29 across)



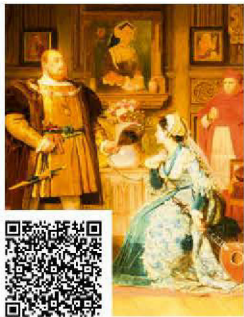
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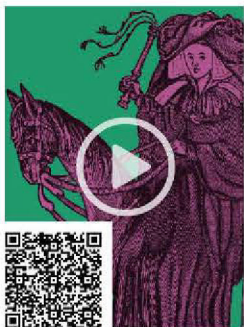
[historyextra.com/messalina](https://www.historyextra.com/messalina)



The households of Henry VIII's six wives

The fates of Henry's spouses are well known, but what happened to the households of these queens when their mistress left the stage? James Taffe explores how the king's marital instability impacted on those who served his queens.

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5 things you should know about Geoffrey Chaucer

Geoffrey Chaucer is one of the most famous figures in medieval England, renowned as the 'father of English literature'. In this video, professor Marion Turner shares five key facts about the 14th-century poet and author.

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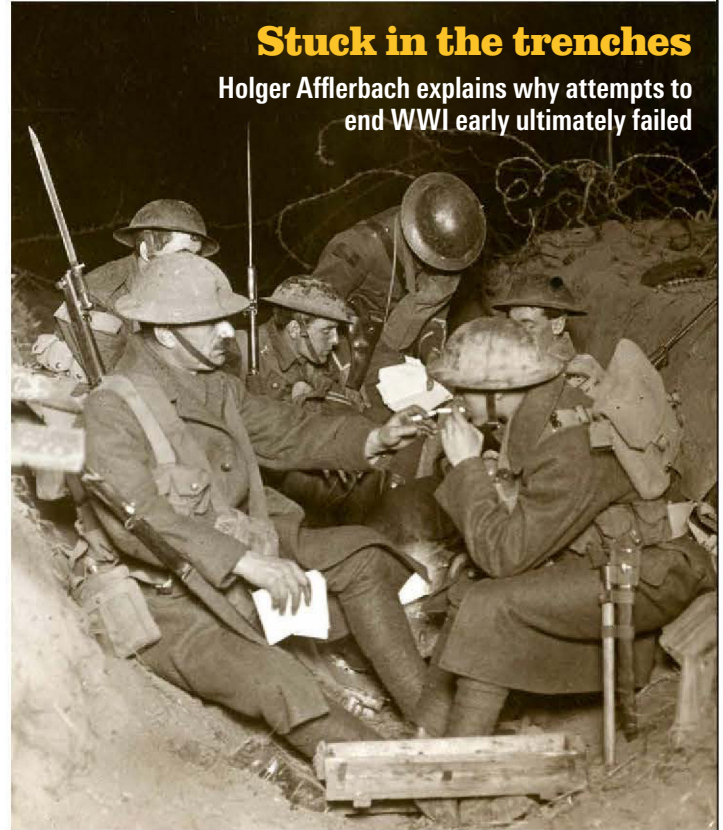
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NEXT MONTH

September issue on sale 3 August 2023

Stuck in the trenches

Holger Afflerbach explains why attempts to end WWI early ultimately failed



The quake that shook Japan

Christopher Harding on the seismic impact of the 1923 Great Kanto Earthquake

Scandalous Georgians

Emily Brand highlights eight events that shocked 18th-century society



Scotland in command

Helen Carr reveals how the battle of Bannockburn put England on the defensive

Bridgerton author Julia Quinn chooses

Harriet Tubman

c1822–1913



Julia Quinn is the author of the *Bridgerton* series of books. Her latest novel, *Queen Charlotte*, is out now. *Queen Charlotte: A Bridgerton Story* is available to watch on Netflix. juliaquinn.com



Harriet Tubman in a colourised photo of c1900. "The qualities that made her so exceptional were her courage and powerful sense of right and wrong," says Julia Quinn

IN PROFILE

Harriet Tubman was an American abolitionist. Born into slavery, she escaped in 1849, and subsequently escorted many other enslaved people to safety in free states and, later, Canada, where slavery had been abolished. After the outbreak of the American Civil War she served in the Union Army as a cook, nurse, scout and spy. In later life she was active in the women's suffrage movement. She died in 1913, aged about 90.

// She undertook 13 missions in all, leading more than 70 enslaved people to freedom along the Underground Railroad //

When did you first hear about Harriet Tubman? I can't remember *not* knowing about her. In the US, she's regarded as an iconic figure in the struggle for black emancipation, particularly through her work with the Underground Railroad – the network of secret routes and safe houses that helped enslaved people escape to freedom.

What kind of woman was she? Born into slavery in Maryland, she was brutally beaten and whipped by enslavers – she suffered lifelong dizziness, pain and hypersomnia after being hit on the head by a heavy metal weight while just a girl. She was a petite, deeply religious woman, but the qualities that made her so exceptional were her courage and powerful sense of right and wrong.

What made Tubman a hero? First, the incredible bravery she showed in escaping enslavement in 1849 and then in repeatedly returning to Maryland to rescue other enslaved people from the inhuman treatment to which they were subjected. Second, her extraordinary exploits on behalf of the Union Army during the American Civil War: she even led a charge that resulted in the liberation of more than 700 enslaved people. Last, her vigorous campaigning for women's suffrage. Her actions would be heroic at any time, but were especially so in the age in which she lived.

What was her finest hour? It's not a single moment or act but her repeated trips back to Maryland – 13 missions in all, leading more than 70 people to freedom along the Underground Railroad. Tubman travelled mainly at night to avoid detection, but still there was a great risk to her personal safety – one Maryland newspaper offered a \$100 reward for her capture – so every return trip to a slave state was perilous. Yet she never lost a 'passenger' [rescued person].

Is there anything that you don't particularly admire about her? Not really. I don't share her religious zeal, though it was this very zeal that gave her the strength to undertake her rescue work.

Do you think she deserves to be better known outside the US? Yes – and I hope that plans to put her face on the US \$20 bill come to fruition, because that would help introduce her to all who visit America. We currently don't have a single woman or person of colour on any of our paper notes.

What would you ask her if you could meet her? Weren't you scared? And how did you work past that fear? **H**

Julia Quinn was talking to York Membery



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